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ABSTRACT

Six reporters in diverse areas looked at how their communities were responding to adult literacy, basic skills, and workplace literacy programs. This guide contains six reports, three in each of its two parts: (1) Reporting on Welfare Reform--Is the Story Literacy or Decent Jobs? and (2) Reporting on Literacy Programs--Is There a "Literacy/Basic Skills" System? Part 1 contains the following papers: "San Diego--Gain, but at a Big Price" (Sharong Jones); "Akron--Training for 'Slave Labor,'" (Thrity Umrigar); and "Belle Glade--Heavy on Referrals, Light on Jobs" (Christopher Boyd). Part 2 contains the following papers: "Laurel--Adjusting Again to Higher Skills" (Lea Anne Brandon, Reagan Walker); "Tucson--Skills Gap in Two Languages" (Susan Knight); and "Westchester County--Cracks in the Systems" (Rhoda Gilinsky). The following conclusions are presented: (1) few data attest to the success of these programs; (2) math skills may be more important than reading skills; (3) lack of support services is a significant barrier to program success; (4) no single system for adult literacy exists; (5) more coordination between programs and employers is needed; and (6) programs are more successful if participants improve literacy skills while preparing for jobs. (NLA)

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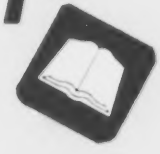

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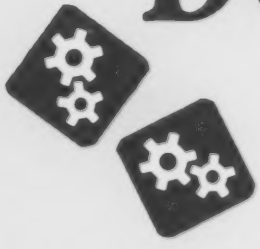

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Political Will?

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Is the Story Literacy, Decent Jobs or Political Will?

A Reporter's Guide to Emerging Adult Literacy Issues

"None of us can afford to see growing disenfranchisement. It hurts all of us, ethically and economically. It would be a good thing to make all of these people part of the system. The only real tool is education. Ignorance is just too expensive."

—adult education supervisor, Southern Westchester BOCES

A report of the Education Writers Association

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ABOUT THE REPORTERS

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Rhoda M. Gilinsky has been a freelance journalist for 15 years, based in New Rochelle, N.Y. She writes regularly for the Westchester County and Connecticut sections of *The New York Times*. She has published articles in a variety of magazines and newsletters, including *Working Mother*, *Readers' Digest*, *Education Week* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. She holds a master's degree from Radcliffe and a bachelor's degree from Connecticut College.

Sharon L. Jones has been with the *San Diego Tribune* since 1988, on general assignment and for the last 18 months covering education. Her beat changed recently to general assignment with a government affairs emphasis, which will give her opportunity to study programs like GAIN. She worked for the Associated Press in San Diego, San Francisco and Cheyenne, Wyo., and for the *Santa Barbara News-Press*. She graduated from California State University at Northridge and has a master's from Columbia University School of Journalism.

Susan M. Knight is a freelance writer based in Tucson, Ariz. She is associate editor of the *Tucson Weekly* and teaches journalism at Pima Community College. In her 10 years as a reporter at the *Arizona Daily Star*, she covered elementary and secondary schools and higher education. She is a graduate of the University of Arizona's School of Journalism and was a 1986-87 Michigan Journalism Fellow at the University of Michigan. She has won numerous state and national awards for education writing.

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OVERVIEW:

The literacy and skills of adults in the United States are falling behind those of other Western nations, according to recent national reports, the testimony of employers and national leaders. To restore national competitiveness and prepare for the 21st century, the nation's governors and the Bush Administration have declared a national goal that every adult have literacy skills to be employable and productive by the year 2000.

Is a system in place to meet this goal? Can the nation assist growing numbers of welfare-dependent women to improve their skills and enter the workforce? What are their needs and how are current programs meeting these needs? What new programs are in place to upgrade skills of the existing workforce? How is business responding in local communities?

The Education Writers Association has tracked responses to the literacy and basic skills lag over the last several years. We were interested in what new policies and programs to meet the growing consensus about low basic skills were accomplishing. Two areas, in particular, flagged our attention—the Family Support Act of 1988 and workplace literacy efforts. If teen parents and older women on welfare were gaining better skills to enter the workforce and existing workers had access to programs to help them meet new job demands, then the national goal might just be reached.

We asked six reporters in diverse areas to look at how their communities were responding. In San Diego, Akron, and rural Belle Glade, Florida, reporters interviewed welfare clients, program administrators and community advocates to determine the progress of the local JOBS program. In rural Laurel, Miss., Tucson, and Westchester County, N.Y., we asked reporters to explore the programs available for those who needed or wanted to upgrade their literacy and basic skills.

In both sets of studies, the findings raise questions that should be probed in other communities across the country.

- In general, little data exists to confirm or deny the success of these programs at this time. Only an outside evaluation on the San Diego Gain program and a statewide literacy survey in Mississippi could nail down what needs are and whether they are being met.

- Math skills may be more important than reading and verbal skills in gaining access to the job market. In both groups, limited math skills was a major determinant of difficulty in obtaining good positions or further training.

- The high costs of the JOBS programs may be leading state officials to cut back on support services and rely on referral to other programs. At the same time, lack of support services—limited day care, lack of transportation, lack of counseling services—was a significant barrier to success in a training or literacy program for both those on welfare and those in the workforce.

- Literacy programs are many and varied. Few are specifically aimed at upgrading the skills of those in the workforce or long-term welfare clients. A "system" does not exist for adults to independently search for programs to meet their needs. While perhaps a single system is not a solution, locating a program that suits specific needs is too difficult.

- While business leaders are leading the debate over the country's competitiveness, few have pitched in to develop programs for their own workers. At the same time, community-based programs often lack direct linkage to jobs available or skills needed by employers. More coordination with the workplace appears warranted for both the JOBS program and community literacy and basic skills efforts.

- Research shows that programs are more successful if participants improve literacy skills while preparing for jobs. Indeed, the most highly motivated individuals interviewed by reporters were those who were seeking to upgrade skills connected to their work or who already had some work experience or advanced education, if they were in the JOBS program. Those who felt forced into education/training in the JOBS program had lower skills, little work experience, and were the least motivated. These participants, however, were often in the lowest quality programs and little was expected of them. It is not clear whether the motivation factor is personal or one of dead-end training.

The reporters found a picture which is varied and complex. Policymakers are struggling to find the right programs and policies to prepare citizens for the 21st century. This adult learning field contains ample ideas for interesting, provocative reporting throughout the country.

PART 1

Reporting on Welfare Reform: Is the Story Literacy or Decent Jobs?

"I was embarrassed to be on AFDC. I hated to cash my welfare check and tried to make sure nobody I knew was watching when I did. But Project Independence helped me out of there and into a job."
—Florida JOBS participant

"This is a dead end job. I ain't going nowhere."—Ohio JOBS participant

Congress intended that the Family Support Act of 1988 would replace dependency upon welfare with self-sufficiency for the approximately 3.3 million people receiving aid. The heart of the legislation is the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, providing those receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with education, training and job-finding services.

States were to have approved plans in place by October 1990. However, all but seven states implemented the JOBS program earlier. Many of them incorporated JOBS into existing welfare-to-work experiments that had received waivers from federal regulations, allowed under legislation approved by Congress in the mid-1980s. In fact, JOBS is based on the experiences of these states.

Because nine-tenths of all recipients are women, JOBS is primarily an effort to help poor women qualify for and find employment that will keep them off the welfare rolls permanently. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), a chief architect of the Family Support Act, noted during the Congressional debate that poverty cannot be eradicated overnight but that it is possible to change direction: "We can and we must set a new trend in place by creating a new system of child support that, without abandoning ultimate security, puts its first emphasis on earned income."

There are many provisions in the JOBS program, but, essentially, it is to provide literacy and remedial education, with the regulations specifying the skills-level goal that of an eighth-grade education, although this is hard to define. Many state plans identify the education goal as a high school diploma or the equivalent. The program also is to provide job training and work experience "for jobs that exist in the community." Agencies are encouraged to collaborate, and JOBS participants are to be provided with child care and transportation, where necessary. These support services, as well as health benefits, are to continue for up to a year after a person moves from welfare to a job. Federal funds match states for support of the mandated services under JOBS.

JOBS represents a major policy change and an attempt to prevent another generation held down because of low literacy skills. The Education Writers Association asked three education reporters/writers in different geographic areas to investigate how JOBS was doing. San Diego County in California, the Akron area in Ohio, and rural Belle Glade in Florida were selected for their diversity and because each state had experience in welfare-to-work programs before the JOBS deadline.

The reporters began with certain assumptions:

- Because it primarily serves women, JOBS will need to be different from traditional education/training services. For example, young mothers virtually end their education after a child is born (only one-half of AFDC recipients have graduated from high school or the equivalent, compared to 88% of non-welfare mothers). So, not only are the basic literacy skills of this group poor, but they probably are truly deficient in the skills required for high-skill, and better paying, jobs—math skills. Females generally are far behind males on math ability. Child care is of utmost importance to AFDC mothers. These problems infer that dropping back into a regular school program, where they did not do well before, or enrolling in traditionally taught courses are not the most appropriate solutions to the low basic skills of this group.
- Successful programs for poor, single mothers link basic skills with specific job training tied to real local job opportunities. There have been many demonstration projects with this age group, and the one model that works is "deep training," or intensive on-the-job experience in a field where there are local jobs. If the program does not provide this, how do JOBS participants move from education to training/work? How many of them drop out, how many find work, how many return to welfare?
- There are differences between long-term welfare recipients and those new to welfare dependence. JOBS is to focus primarily on two groups—those for whom welfare has become an intergenerational dependence and teenage mothers. Designing appropriate programs for each group depends upon good assessments and quality options. The former group will need longer time in education/training; the latter may benefit from prompt employment that raises their self-esteem.
- The cost of quality JOBS programs has been underestimated. Demonstration projects indicated that welfare mothers' literacy skills are much worse than anticipated. Meanwhile, state budgets are tight, and social service programs are being trimmed heavily.

The reporters' profiles of the JOBS programs confirm some of these assumptions. For others, the data are not available yet. More importantly, their articles tend to question the basic optimism that welfare reform will produce significant improvement in the lives of the poor. In fact, a February report from Child Trends, a Washington group that analyzes children's issues, concludes that welfare mothers whose education and training would place them in the top quarter of the AFDC population probably would make it off of welfare on their own. Those in the second quarter could benefit the most from JOBS. Those in the bottom half, however, are so low in skills, work experience and self-esteem as to minimize any kind of interven-

tion. Granted, it is early to make judgments about such big policy changes. It takes time for different bureaucracies to come together to help people acquire a variety of skills. But enough problems were uncovered by the reporters to cause doubts about how much JOBS can do and how soon.

Some common themes emerge from the articles:

- *JOBS is turning out to be more expensive than anticipated, primarily because of higher costs for education and child care.* In the one program with some assessment of needs, California's GAIN program, recipients were found to have poorer literacy skills than anticipated (60% needed remedial education, instead of the 15% predicted.) Child care costs are using up as much as one-half of the budget for JOBS in some places.
- *High costs, growing AFDC rolls and state budget problems are combining to reduce the quantity and quality of services under JOBS—or prevent good programs from ever being put in place.* California administrators want to restrict the program to older women; Florida shifts most expenses to other programs, including the federal Job Training Partnership Act. Some programs rely on job counseling as their major emphasis; this is the cheapest way to serve clients but not particularly the most effective. Staffs are too small to adequately administer the program. A recent *Washington Post* article says states are shifting funds away from such programs as AFDC in order to fund programs for young children. Yet, some literacy experts contend that skills of parents must be improved—if those of their children are expected to improve.
- *JOBS seems to be most helpful to those already motivated to seek employment and to older women, even though young mothers are a target group of the program.* The unmotivated resent the program, do not enroll for it, or, as in one case, used the child care services but avoided education/training programs.
- *Job training tends to focus on low-skill jobs which do not link to careers and do not provide incomes sufficient to replace welfare benefits.* In two of the three communities, there seemed to be little relationship between training and local employer needs or available jobs. Those enrollees who obtained jobs were making wages below the poverty line.
- *For higher-paying jobs, the predominant literacy problem may be math skills rather than verbal skills.* Also, JOBS clients do better the more quickly they move into on-the-job training where they learn specific skills.
- *In all three communities, the lack of stable employment, with sufficient wages and benefits to support a family, tends to negate any improvement in literacy/employability of JOBS clients.* This brings up questions about other policies that might be needed, such as job development, business-sector responsibility for on-the-job training and for continued investment in entry-level employees, and public sector employment as a last resort. Furthermore, in all of the communities, problems of limited child care, the lack of a minimum health care system, and the absence of transportation affected enrollment in programs, success in job training and job search, and successful completion of the program.

Tips for Reporting About Jobs

- *Learn as much as possible about the program and AFDC population before going out on interviews.* It is a complicated area, and a reporter could waste a lot of time trying to get the basics from people in the field who are busy and sometimes hard to pin down. One reporter estimates that it would take a month to do a good reporting job on this subject.
- *Keep pushing on the data.* Program directors tend to exaggerate the number of enrollees and of placements, but they have to turn in reports with presumably accurate counts. States and local data may not match, but the data collection systems are bound to improve, particularly if the media press them on basic facts, such as enrollments, dropouts, job placements, and those who return to welfare.
- *Check non-agency sources for data and information.* These would include national groups which have conducted studies in your state or community, advocacy groups, or non-profit groups which serve the same population.
- *Be careful of being "programmed" by the bureaucracy.* Two of the three reporters had to work around efforts to limit their contacts. All of them had to question data given them. Program people may hand pick clients for you to interview, so try to get some interviews on your own (one reporter just walked into a vocational program and asked for volunteers).
- *Don't build a story around just one or two interviews.* The problems/needs of JOBS participants are so varied that "shadowing" one person through the system may skew the picture too much, but a focus group of participants might provide an overall view. Those staff who work directly with the JOBS participants, as compared to agency heads, probably have a better feel for what is happening to individuals.
- *Disaggregate those on welfare.* Older women's goals and attitudes may be different from those of teenage mothers. Those with some job experience will have different needs from those who have never worked. Long-term welfare recipients may be more difficult to educate and train—and cost more.
- *Compare training with jobs available.* Are they tied together and are adjustments planned for? Get average wage data on those placed in jobs and compare to welfare support.

Sources

Center for Law and Social Policy, Mark Greenberg, 1616 P St., NW, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 328-5140.

Child Trends, Nicholas Zill, 2100 M St., NW, Washington, DC, 20036; (202) 223-6288.

Education Writers Association, Lisa Walker or Anne Lewis, 1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 429-9680.

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Katherine McFate, 1301 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20004; (202) 626-3500.

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, David Long, 3 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016; (212) 532-3200.

National Governors' Association, Welfare Reform Technical Assistance Project, Center for Policy Research, Linda McCart, 444 North Capitol St., Washington, DC 20001; (202) 624-5336.

Rockefeller Foundation, Minority Female Single Parent Program, Phoebe Cottingham, 1133 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036; (212) 869-8500.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Family Support Administration, Office of Communications, 370 L'Enfant Promenade SW, Washington, DC 20447; (202) 252-4518.

PHOTO BY JOHN NELSON/SAN DIEGO TRIBUNE

Voluntary enrollee Elizabeth Miller was cut from GAIN, in an effort to save money. Says Miller, "I had to comply with my end of the bargain, but they pulled out. I think that's unfair."

SAN DIEGO: Gain, But at a Big Price

by Sharon L. Jones

"I feel a lot of people are in the program who don't want to be. Some of them feel they are being forced to attend school. I think overall it's beneficial, but there are bugs to be worked out."

—social worker with the GAIN program

Aurora Durazo is 37 years old and learning to read, add and subtract for the first time, and she's never had such fun. Born in central California, one of 10 children of a migrant worker and his wife, Durazo went to school one year, for the second grade. She started working at age 14 as a maid. A year later she began working in a bedspread factory, staying there 15 years until her marriage fell apart.

Durazo then moved to San Diego County with her four children. However, without a high school diploma or the equivalent, she could not find a job, even in a garment factory with sewing machines like the ones she had operated for years. To feed her children, she went on welfare, a humiliating experience for the proud Mexican-American. Then she was told she had to enroll in Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN), a welfare-to-work program that teaches participants basic education skills before they learn vocational skills or are obligated to look for a job.

She jumped at the chance. Each day she joins other adults in a storefront lab, works out math and language problems on a computer and participates in roundtable sessions led by a friendly, supportive instructor. Then she goes home and does her homework, beside her children. "For the first time, I said I am coming to school," said Durazo, whose oldest child is 18 and youngest is 4. "Now I know what I missed. It's nice. I wish I was younger. It really encourages me to tell my children to keep going to school and not drop out."

Durazo is the kind of GAIN student that touches instructors' hearts. Her enthusiasm is infectious. She and her children will clearly be better off as a result of her enrollment in GAIN, regardless of what kind of job she obtains. Her eyes have been opened to the potential of a better life. This is one benefit that will never show up in cost-savings reviews on which the ambitious welfare-to-work program will be judged.

But Durazo is also the kind of student who is running up the GAIN bill beyond expectations. Three times as many GAIN participants need basic education skills as predicted, or about 60%. And they are taking longer to finish the education segment, which is delaying their entrance into the job market and their exit from welfare rolls.

Durazo also is an exception because of her initial enthusiasm about the program, which is unusual in its emphasis on upfront education before job search or job training. Most welfare recipients resent the mandatory enrollment. Only 60% show up for orientation, and many drop out before completing the multistep process to the workforce. Though the program carries the threat of sanctions, it is an idle threat. Deferments are being given generously, and sanctions are rarely carried out.

The program is at a crossroads, largely because of financial constraints due to sky-rocketing child care costs and a state fiscal crisis. Lawmakers and county officials are scrambling for ways to make it more cost-effective. The emphasis on education that earned GAIN widespread notoriety may fall by the wayside in coming months, before a comprehensive review of the program is due to be published.

Some GAIN officials, including the director of the San Diego program, Ray Koenig, believe a more integrated approach—with job training and basic skills combined—would be more effective for many participants. San Diego was to begin a pilot program in March to test this approach, which is believed to speed learning by giving participants a tangible incentive to learn basic skills. Others, including newly seated Gov. Pete Wilson, are pushing for a heavier emphasis on job search in the beginning stages of GAIN to hasten the time between enrollment and employment. Only those who fail to find a job would be forwarded to activities strengthening their education and job skills.

That would bring GAIN close to the format used by San Diego in an earlier welfare-to-work program, called Saturation Work Initiative Model (SWIM). It produced substantial short-term welfare savings but had little success raising the net income of participants. Critics fear this approach will fail to break the cycle of poverty because it tends to put welfare recipients in low-paying jobs without the skills to help them advance.

The Cadillac Version

It is too early to tell which direction California will go but one thing is clear: California cannot afford to continue the program as it is designed currently. "We're all doing well to hold the line," said Lee Kemper, Sacramento-based executive director of the County Welfare Directors Association. " I think what it (the cost) is doing is giving everyone the incentive to go back and look at ways to make GAIN even more effective. People are revisiting some of the assumptions made, particularly in light of the evidence."

Designed in 1985, GAIN changed the conditions for receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) by requiring that large numbers of recipients engage in activities designed to move them into jobs and off welfare. It is considered one of the most ambitious programs for welfare reform in the United States, largely because of a heavy emphasis on education before job search or job training.

It also is one of the most expensive of its kind, with a budget this year of $363 million. So far, California, with one-sixth of the nation's welfare recipients, has enrolled about 311,000 people in GAIN. But the majority have failed to complete the

entire program. About 90,000 have found jobs after enrolling in GAIN but fewer than 25,000 people were earning enough to terminate welfare payments by mid-1990.

The program—a compromise between conservatives, who feared creating a college-scholarship program, and liberals who opposed work-for-welfare programs—is complicated and strictly structured. But the rules are being bent somewhat at the local level in a variety of ways, from not punishing dropouts to mixing vocational training into the academic classroom sessions as much as possible.

Who is a GAIN client? Possibly your next-door-neighbor, its administrators said—women with children who fell into the socio-economic basement in the wake of divorce, refugees with college degrees from their native countries who do not speak English, the children of poor Hispanic immigrants whose migratory lifestyle limited their education. A growing number are teenage parents, placed under GAIN because of federal legislation designed to cut welfare dependency.

GAIN was modified in 1989 to meet the requirements of the federal Job Opportunities and Basic Training (JOBS) program under the Family Support Act of 1988. This opened the door for mothers with pre-school children and teenage parents. While GAIN instructors are enthusiastic about helping younger welfare mothers improve their chances for success in the workforce, their presence has sent child care costs through the roof.

In San Diego, the state's second largest city and one of the leaders in welfare-to-work programs, child care costs have swallowed up 30% of Koenig's budget; meanwhile, the state reduced his annual allotment. Budget problems forced the county to close GAIN to new admits mid-way through the current fiscal year. Koenig plans to lay off 60 workers, 20% of his staff, to balance his budget by the beginning of the fiscal year, July 1. He also is looking for other ways to be more cost-effective, such as making his social workers more specialized so that they handle only certain types of clients.

Koenig's budget has dropped $4 million over the past two years. He expects another $2 million cut, bringing his budget down to $18 million for the 1991-92 fiscal year. So far his program has enrolled 34,700 people in GAIN, out of 54,000 eligible families. Koenig said about 24,400 found jobs, saving the state an estimated $63 million in welfare grants. But fewer than 3,000 families have completely left welfare rolls. The average starting salary was $6.13 an hour.

Over-Regulation?

Koenig plans to spend a lot of time this year in Sacramento arguing for more flexibility for the counties in implementing GAIN. "The legislation for GAIN is among the most specific I've ever read," he bemoaned. "We've gotten to the point that GAIN is over-regulated. The demographics and resources vary dramatically from county to county. The clients vary. At times, the client needs say go left, but GAIN says go right."

Almost 60% of those enrolled in GAIN flunk a basic math and reading test set at the sixth grade level. Most of them pass the reading portion, but under GAIN rules all are obligated to enter the education segment. Koenig would like to see that changed so that those who pass reading go onto job search and job training, even if they tested poorly in math. He noted that graduates of the learning labs often lose their math skills quickly.

He also would like to see rules toughened further on "self-initiates," or people who enroll themselves in GAIN. About 60% of his child care costs go towards children of self-initiates, some of whom are enrolled in community colleges and university courses, he said. He feels these participants could achieve their educational goals on their own through existing community programs and that they are taking up space and money which could be spent better on more needy welfare clients.

While Koenig feels the program suffers from over-regulation, advocacy groups disagree. Clare Pastore, attorney for Los Angeles-based Western Center on Law and Poverty, said she does not trust counties like San Diego to keep clients' best interests in mind. Her group filed a class action suit in a San Francisco court on behalf of voluntary GAIN participants, or self-initiates, who were ordered out of the program in the fall of 1990. Last year, nearly one-fifth of those actively participating in GAIN activities in San Diego were self-initiates, or about 660 clients, according to Pastore. About 200 San Diego self-initiates were dropped in the fall, including some who were within months of graduating from vocational training programs, she said. She feels the county was wrong to kick out people who were benefitting from the program when there are people languishing in GAIN classrooms who would rather be at home.

She is disturbed by an apparent shift within the program statewide away from the emphasis on education. "The point of JOBS was recognizing that independence requires a long-term investment in people. It's disturbing to see the state backing away from that," she said.

Child Care Costs Zoom

The cost of child care is driving program operators like Koenig to consider reversing the requirements for GAIN to exclude mothers with pre-school age children, except for teen parents. Before JOBS, GAIN accepted only welfare mothers with children over six. "I'm not sure it's legal to do that, but it may not matter," Koenig said of excluding the mothers with younger children. "If we do that, we could serve half again as many people. What we need to do is utilize our resources as best we can."

The San Diego GAIN program is recognized as one of the best in the state. It was one of the quickest into operation because San Diego already had experimented with similar pro-

Gain in San Diego

San Diego County:	Fourth largest in country
Dept. of Social Services Budget:	$673 million per year
Employees:	3,500
Client Expenditures:	$2.6m/day
Number served:	142,000
Average grant:	$535/family/month
Average food stamps:	$511/family
Average childcare:	$225/child/month
Up to $144/week for a child under 2	
Up to $103/week for children, ages 2 to 5	

grams that required cooperation of the local welfare agency with various local schools, colleges and vocational training programs. It has acted as a trend-setter, developing techniques and programs adopted by other counties.

Beginning in 1979, San Diego cut its food stamp caseload significantly by requiring able-bodied food stamp recipients to work in exchange for benefits and providing them with job search workshops and unpaid work experience. That program evolved into a state-funded employment preparation program, which offered similar services. In 1985, San Diego tested the feasibility of a "saturation" employment program that mandated continuous participation for all eligible welfare recipients. SWIM expanded the services of the previous programs to include referral to community-operated adult education and vocational classes and on-the-job training programs.

To implement GAIN, the county opened 23 GAIN learning centers and filled them with hundreds of computers, setting up a non-traditional classroom environment that staff hoped would be non-threatening. While operated by schools and colleges, the labs are visited daily by special educational social workers who follow the clients' progress. Budget cuts already have closed three of those labs.

Statistics show the need: 15% of GAIN participants are not proficient in English. About 40% lack a high school diploma; 25% of the high school graduates lack basic skills. But more of them are reluctant—some even hostile—when they arrive at the learning labs, instructors said. They would rather be spending their time learning job skills.

Many are won over by GAIN staff. Susan Molina, a 28-year-old with three children, said she came in with a chip on her shoulder. But after six months she is enthusiastic. "I feel smart now, compared to before," said Molina, who is working toward her high school equivalent certificate (GED) and is so turned on to learning that she has taken to watching educational television. "I used to be afraid to go out and get a job because I didn't think I was smart enough."

But many remain resistant. Some GAIN staff believe that the education section ends up wasting time and state money. "I feel a lot of people are in the program who don't want to be," said social worker Nancy Rideout. "Some of them feel they are being forced to attend school. I think overall it's beneficial, but there are bugs to be worked out."

About one-third of the clients drop out of GAIN for reasons deemed "legitimate" by staff, such as illness. About 5% of those enrolled in San Diego's GAIN dropped out with "illegitimate" reasons and were penalized, a higher rate than the statewide average of 1%. Some staff said even documented "legitimate" excuses are questionable. Rany Mey, an instructional aide who works with ESL students, suspects that doctors in the Indo-Chinese community are offering medical excuses for a price. She has tried to push social workers to sanction some delinquent students because she feels it sets a bad example for the others, but the social workers refused, citing fear of lawsuits.

"A case worker said that if she pushes the hardest case to complete ESL and to work, students will sue," said Mey, an immigrant from Cambodia who herself was in an ESL class 15 years ago. "The students will say the pressure made them crazy. They'll pretend they are sick and apply for disability. The case worker said she can't do anything."

Mey has her own theories why it is taking GAIN clients longer to complete the education part of the program than expected, in some cases more than a year. She said that many of her students do not want to get a job because they fear becoming ineligible for welfare. "Sometimes students laugh at people who work," she said. "They said, 'What for? You work, you get less money than me and income taxes are taken out.' "

To ease students' apprehensions when they first arrive at a learning lab, instructors show a video of student "success stories." It features former students talking about how scared they were when they first enrolled in GAIN but how happy they are that they stuck with the program and achieved their educational goals. The video is "success-oriented," just like the curriculum. Staff are trained to use language and teaching techniques which increase students' self-esteem and encourage self-sufficiency. For example, even illiterate students use the computers. While it may take months to learn to read, they learn to type and lose their fear of computers within weeks. A paper banner on a classroom wall reads: "Through these doors pass the most important people in the world."

The curriculum is competency-based, with the learning tailored to the working world. On a recent day in an English-as-a-second-language class, for example, the teacher led students in a discussion of phrases that might come in handy during a job interview, such as "I am a hard worker" or "I can meet a deadline." And in a nearby room, the students working toward the GED tried to figure out the price of a jacket with a 25% discount. Last year, about 1,140 students reached their educational goals in the GAIN learning labs; 645 obtained basic skills, 304 passed the GED tests, and 92 became proficient in English. They spent an average of four months in the learning labs before moving on to job search or job training components.

Added Services

San Diego's GAIN has broadened its involvement with its clients beyond education and job skills to deal with their everyday problems. For example, its staff developed discussion modules that motivate parents to be more active in their children's education and provide consumer information to help them stretch their limited budgets to meet families' needs. GAIN also is involved in "Operation Bootstrap," a program that helps low-income families find subsidized housing, and "New Chance," an education program that targets at-risk youth.

San Diego's GAIN also has operated a teen parent project that was honored with a National Association of Counties Achievement Award. Nearly 800 teens have enrolled in the program since May 1988, and 65 have earned high school diplomas. A teen support group meets once a week at one school which offers child care and special classes for pregnant teens. Students said they enjoy the weekly sessions, where they can talk about problems they have with boyfriends or their children.

"It helps get the stress off your chest," said Tanisha Mayfield, an 18-year-old black woman with an eight-month-old son. "They help with any problem, a boyfriend or girlfriend problem or a school problem." According to Mayfield, the best thing about GAIN is it pays for child care for her son, Remean, and her bus fare to school. The daughter of a teen-age mother, she is in the program voluntarily; she has dreams of going on to college and becoming a pediatrician. But she said many of the girls are in school because otherwise they risk losing their

welfare benefits. Teen parents are a priority group under JOBS legislation because studies show that a teenage mother is apt to become a longterm welfare recipient and her children will grow up to be welfare recipients.

Marilyn Stewart, operations manager of the San Diego program, said the teens can be the most satisfying clients to work with because the results can be quick and dramatic. Most come into the program with low self-esteem and little drive but quickly turn around, she said. "It makes such a difference to them. They don't have a lot of confidence, and they don't have a good sense of who they are. A lot of them had the baby because they wanted to be somebody, they wanted someone to love."

GAIN employees are discouraged by the budget cutbacks and frustrated by the growing emphasis on cost-effectiveness. "I don't think you're going to see instantaneous results here," said Carolyn Barry, a former elementary and community college instructor who is working with GED students. A dynamic teacher who has designed innovative classroom activities such as jeopardy-like quizzes, Barry pushes her students hard. But she is worried that their success rate won't meet state analysts' satisfaction. "I was blue-collar myself and raised in a dysfunctional family," she said. "It takes a long time to change the way you think about yourself."

Barry believes San Diego's GAIN learning labs are a glimpse into the future of education. Barry wholeheartedly supports more integration of vocational skills into the education process such as the office skills and mechanic technician programs that were to begin in March. "This is the way education should be," she said, waving a hand at the dozens of adults busily working away at computer terminals, including some working on word processing programs smuggled in by instructors. "This is the way schools should be, the way college should be. The computer really meets their varying needs."

Most of her students agree. Teklom Hagos, a 34-year-old man who dropped out of school in the 10th grade in Ethiopia to join a rebel group, is learning geography and math as he practices his typing on the computer terminal. He speaks English fairly well, having learned it from foreigners while living in a resettlement camp in Sudan. But his reading and writing need work. Hagos hopes to get an office job because an old bullet injury prevents him from more active work. He wants to be able to support his wife and two children by himself. "It's very different here from my country," he said. "Here, there's a chance to learn if you're willing to learn. I was out of school for 15 years so to come here, it's new. It's hard. But it's very interesting. I'm very glad."

Across the room, Richard Bonilla, a 20-year-old high school dropout, works on a geography program that seems more like a video game, called "Where in the world is Carmen San Diego?" After dropping out of school when his girlfriend had a child, he has realized that he will never get anywhere without more education. Even his father will not hire him to work in construction without the equivalent of a high school diploma. "I want to show everybody that I can do it," he said. "I'll be more satisfied when I'm done. I'll feel better about myself."

Many welfare experts are convinced that people like Bonilla, Hagos, Molina, and Durazo, their children, and California as a whole, will be better off for their experience in the educational portion of GAIN, whether or not the entire program proves cost-effective. Koenig pointed to the high percentage of high school dropouts on the welfare rolls, and he added, "I think it's good to provide someone a second chance."

GAIN graduate Jennifer Shipley echoes his sentiments. She earned her GED in a few weeks after enrolling in GAIN. The 29-year-old, who has a nine-year-old son, is working part-time as an instructional aide for GAIN. Dressed in black pumps and a sharp black suit, she walks confidently around the classroom, helping students and the instructor operate the computers. "They teach you how to sell yourself," she said. But she is not off welfare completely yet. She figures she cannot afford to until her son is older. If she worked full-time, child care costs would eat her paycheck. "It's outrageous," she said.

Tips for Reporters

Give yourself more than a month to do the project. Not that you need to spend all of this time interviewing, but it will take this amount of time to crack a probably overworked and media-leery bureaucracy.

Data needed in order to take a critical look, such as dropout rates, may not yet be available from social service departments. Numbers from local and state agencies do not always match. Administrators, as one might expect, tend to focus on the positive. You will have to push them.

Outside agencies, such as the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (415-441-7607), are frequently contracted to analyze welfare-to-work programs. Their reports provide invaluable background that can help you frame your questions and your investigation.

Two advocacy organizations also were helpful: San Diego Legal Aid Society (Lilianna Chmielowski—619-262-5557) and Western Center on Law and Poverty (Clare Pastore—213-487-7211).

I found policy dictated that every interview I initiated first had to be cleared through top administrators, a time-consuming process. I also had to set up all field observations through top administration.

When in the field, I was accompanied by social workers who obtained clearances from each client I spoke with, a process that might have intimidated some from talking to me.

Your best sources are the personnel who are working with the welfare recipients. They know how the clients feel about the program. They know the inner workings of the program, its strengths and flaws. Some may be reluctant to talk openly, and perhaps for good reason. In one instance the person assigned to accompany me pretended to work on his own project but took notes on my conversations, especially one with a particularly forthright teacher.

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"The point of JOBS was recognizing that independence requires a long-term investment in people. It's disturbing to see the state backing away from that."

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PHOTO BY JOCELYN WILLIAMS/AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

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AKRON: Training for 'Slave Labor'?

by Thrity Umrigar

"Nobody said implementing JOBS would be easy."
—Sticker on an office door at the Summit County Human Services Department

When Earl Hinson, 28, of Barberton first enrolled in the microfilm training program conducted by the Summit County (Ohio) Department of Human Services, he was excited. The training, he believed, would be his ticket out of the welfare trap in which he had been stuck for the last six years. But after completing the four-week program, Hinson is bitter. "This is a dead end job," he said. "I ain't going nowhere."

Being enrolled in Job Club was the best thing that could have happened to Akron's Mary Watt, 42. Today, she is employed in the housekeeping department of Akron City Hospital. She now earns almost $1,200 a month, considerably more than her earlier Aid to families with Dependent Children (AFDC) income of $330. "The future looks pretty good," Watt said. "I was tired of living month-to-month on a welfare check."

Fredonia Walker, 53, has been working at Mobile Meals since last December as part of the Community Work Experience Program (CWEP). The Akron woman has been on welfare off and on for the last 26 years. Walker, a diabetic, said working for her pay check is hard but she is glad to get out of the house and be with other people. "They want you to work," she said. "But I'm not able to work. But they said you can always use your hands, so I goes."

These three people have all been enrolled in different components of the JOBS (Jobs, Opportunities and Basic Skills) program. Their different responses reflect the complexity of the young and often controversial program which assists welfare clients in getting training and education, with the eventual goal of finding them employment.

Since JOBS began in Summit County in July 1989, many have questioned the effectiveness of the $3.2 million a year program. Some even dispute the county's oft-touted claim of having the best JOBS program in Ohio. Critics claim that the county ranks poorly among those with JOBS programs in percentage of clients enrolled in the program, that its on-the-job programs do not train clients for available jobs and that caseworkers in some of the components are overburdened. Officials counter that the county has developed several innovative JOBS programs such as the PALS computer literacy program, it is the only county in the state with its own Job Development program, and it has an outstanding record of finding employment for JOBS clients.

Out of Ohio's 88 counties, about 45 of them currently have a JOBS program in place. Summit County has a population of 514,990, making it the fifth most populous county in Ohio. In 1989, it had an unemployment rate of 5.4%, a little over the state average of 5.2%. That same year, about 65,750 Summit county residents lived below the poverty line. The county's largest city, Akron, once was home to some of the biggest rubber tire manufacturers such as Firestone and Goodyear but has now fallen onto hard times. In November 1990, the welfare department had a total of 13,231 AFDC cases and 6,994 general assistance cases (GA), who are people ineligible for AFDC, such as men or single people with children.

Cheap Labor?

One of the most hotly disputed components of JOBS in Summit County is the Jobs, Skills and Training (JST) program. The four-week program mainly trains clients in three low-skill areas—janitorial, microfilming and landscaping work. Critics such as County Councilman Paul Gallagher said the program is just a way to provide the county with cheap labor. "It is ridiculous. Why spend months training people to be janitors?" Gallagher said. "Programatically, it does not make sense. It's just an abuse. We're training people for jobs that they can get without training and jobs that possibly don't exist."

A Glossary

Job Club. A four-week program which helps clients develop skills that would make them more employable. Clients learn how to prepare resumes, talk on the phone, and present themselves at job interviews.

Education and Training (E&T). The education component keeps track of attendance of clients enrolled in the Adult Basic Education program and those getting their high school diplomas or two-year college degrees. The four-week training unit prepares clients for job skills in three main areas—janitorial skills, landscaping and microfilming.

Community Work Experience Program (CWEP). Helps clients find jobs at non-profit community places. Usually, the program is for clients with no prior job history. CWEP annually provides about $760,000 worth of "free services" to the communities.

Job Development. A marketing unit which matches clients with potential employers.

Principle of the Alphabet Literacy System (PALS). A computer program to teach illiterate clients how to read and write.

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Hinson, who graduated from the microfilming program in mid-December, agreed. He said he entered the program enthusiastic but left frustrated. On AFDC for six years, he spent most of his time sorting out county court records by hand rather than using the microfilming equipment. He did not get to use the equipment until his last week. "What they're doing up there is a fraud," Hinson said. "They just want to say they're graduating people. I was out half the time with a doctor's excuse. Still they're gonna give me a diploma. They pushed me through the doggone system without me learning half of what I was supposed to."

Tom Allio, director of the Catholic Commission, an advocacy group for the poor, said he never understood the agency's reason for choosing microfilming, landscaping and janitorial skills as the three areas of training for clients. Allio said the (JST) program is a way of using "a cheap and available labor pool to accomplish the normal daily county functions. It's very self-serving on part of the county administration and not client focused."

But welfare director Pat McGrath said the training areas were based on a statewide study on job availability done by the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services. "I'm pretty sure we got information from the Akron Regional Development Board," he added. And Morgan Lewis, who has studied JOBS programs in 15 Ohio counties, said he is impressed with the JST program. Lewis is a researcher at the Ohio State University's Center on Education and Training for Employment. "Summit is doing more in that area than any other county. No other county is providing that kind of structured training. Most send their clients to Jobs Training Partnership Act (JPTA) or other programs," Lewis said.

Also, Shirley Quinn, deputy director of the JOBS program, argued that the purpose of the program is not merely to train clients in areas where they will find future employment but to develop a work ethic. "We've found that employers don't care so much about job skills as they do about employees being dependable," she said. However, results of a recent nationwide research study by the Rockefeller Foundation show that the success rate in finding employment is dramatically higher in JOBS programs that develop specific work skills tied to the requirements of industry and tailored to the needs of the clients.

Some Pluses

Still, there are other clients, like Watt, who have benefitted greatly from other components of the JOBS program. While in the four-week Job Club program, Watt learned skills needed to make her employable. "They taught me to use the phone, taught me proper ways to talk with somebody, the way you move your hands," she said. On her last day in Job Club, Watt found her current job. It pays her a decent salary, health benefits and promises her a raise every six months.

For Walker, the benefits have been less tangible but no less important. Being employed after 26 years on welfare have helped her self-esteem and lifted the depression that had gripped her since her daughter died in 1985. "I'm beginning to like it," she said. "I'm not depressed like I used to be. I like working with other people. I understand how to prepare meals, I'm learning how to do book work. I mean, I'm catching on to it."

Walker is not the only one catching on. Several of the clients in the county's PALS program said it is doing for them what a traditional classroom could not. Costing more than $71,000 a year per classroom,it is the only such program run by a welfare department in Ohio—it teaches illiterate clients to read by using computers with touch screens. One enrollee, Pamela Langham, 30, had been a special education student until she quit the Cuyahoga Falls school system in the 11th grade. "I'm learning more here than I ever did in school," she said. "I think it's good that somebody cares about people who couldn't read."

The average age for a student in the PALS program is 34. The average student comes in with a third-grade literacy level, although the average last grade attended is the ninth. Many of the students have learning disabilities and other problems such as drug addiction. So far the 101 clients who have enrolled in the program volunteered to be there. Summit is in the process of implementing an initial literacy test for JOBS clients. Thirty-six students have completed their 100 hours or tested out of the class while about 50 people are currently attending class. The rest have dropped out for personal or medical reasons.

Instructor Kathy Klingele said PALS is successful because it is "multi-sensory. It's better than the conventional way. It's an opportunity they've never had before. It addresses their cry for help." Langham, who has been in PALS for three months, said being able to read has helped her self-image. "You need to be able to read for everyday living," she said. "I want it for myself. I can't tell my five-year-old niece I can't read her book."

Bruce McKeown, 26, who dropped out of school in the eighth grade, said he hoped to earn his GED. "If I get off welfare and get a good job, somebody else can go through this class," he said. McKeown said he wanted to learn to read for several reasons. "They look at you strange if you said you're a dropout. I can't understand the signs hanging up. It really gets to me." After about two months in the program, he was starting to get the hang of the words.

Clients are also getting help in other areas. Project S.A.F.E. (Substance Abuse Free Environment) works with the Community Drug Board and 11 county agencies to provide counseling and treatment to clients with drug addiction problems. Although it was initially introduced as a mandatory program for any client found to have a drug problem, the county has responded to criticism from critics such as Allio. Clients now volunteer to be in the program, which focuses solely on GA clients. Officials estimate that about 10% of them battle drug abuse. Since June 1990, there have been 393 client referrals to Project SAFE.

Only about 40-50 percent of the clients scheduled to come in for JOBS assessments are showing up. For instance, in December 1990, 2,169 clients were called to be assessed for eligibility into a JOBS program; 832 of them came.

Since the summer of 1990, when the JOBS program showed a deficit of $500,000, the number of staff for the program has dropped from an all-time high of 104 to the present 68. A JOBS

worker who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the three workers in the Education and Training (E&T) component are overburdened by their heavy work load. They currently are responsible for monitoring the attendance of 3,311 clients in education programs. Between 1989 and 1990, 5,552 clients enrolled in an education program, such as Adult Basic Education at the University of Akron. A new law mandating that all GA clients between the ages of 19-40 earn their GED or a high school diploma has added to the problem. Clients previously assigned to CWEP are now going to E&T, which is why the caseload has increased. McGrath admitted this is a problem area, but the lack of resources prevent him from getting more workers, he said. He also pointed out another problem area — JOBS assessments. Only about 40-50% of the clients scheduled to come in for JOBS assessments are showing up. For instance, in December 1990, 2,169 clients were called to be assessed for eligibility into a JOBS program; 832 of them came.

The team from Ohio State last year recommended that clients be assessed for JOBS when they come in for their six-month redetermination (of eligibility) interviews. McGrath said the agency had tried that suggestion but found many clients were not showing up even for their redeterminations.

An expansion of the METRO bus service throughout the county will greatly benefit the JOBS program, McGrath said. This will allow the job marketers to contact potential employers who are currently not used because they are not on a bus line.

However, Lewis estimates that a client needs to be placed in a $7-8 an hour job to make it worthwhile for her/him to leave welfare. The 435 jobs that have been found for clients by job marketers pay an average wage of $5.26 an hour.

However, Lewis estimated that a client needs to be placed in a $7-8 an hour job to make it worthwhile for her/him to leave welfare. The 435 jobs that have been found for clients by job marketers pay an average wage of $5.26 an hour. Also, GA clients finding jobs are not provided the transitory health care benefits available to AFDC clients enrolled in JOBS. This provides little incentive for some clients to find jobs. Morgan suggested that the real problem is the lack of job opportunities. "If there are better paying jobs with adequate health care, a lot of people will get off the rolls," he said.

As for the success of the JOBS program, Morgan said that time will tell. "Clients are being brought and (they) are getting jobs. Whether it's at a rate and whether they're staying at the jobs long enough to justify the cost of the program, I don't know."

Tips for Reporters

At the time of preparing this report, many statistics were not yet available which would have made the evaluation of the JOBS program more comprehensive.

For instance, the county has not been keeping any figures on the recidivism rate that would indicate how many of the clients who have found employment under JOBS have returned to the welfare rolls.

McGrath said it is too early to look at recidivism rates. "That's the real test," he admitted. "That's what really interests me. We have done a good job, but our goal is to get people off the rolls permanently."

County Comparisons on JOBS

JOBS Program Enrollment in Selected Ohio Counties (July–September 1990)

	Avg. caseload	No. of JOBS	Percent	Rank*
Summit				
GA	7,197	2,208	30.6	26
ADC	11,719	2,220	18.9	32
Lucas				
GA	8,774	1,337	15.2	39
ADC	13,877	1,753	12.6	39
Montgomery				
GA	5,292	905	17.0	38
ADC	13,327	1,550	11.6	41
Stark				
GA	3,086	1,512	49.0	12
ADC	7,205	1,609	22.3	23
Union				
GA	68	45	66.1	5
ADC	216	124	57.4	1

JOBS Program Employment (July–September 1990)

	No. of employed	Percent	Rank
Summit			
GA	509	23.0	26
ADC	798	35.9	33
Lucas			
GA	269	20.1	33
ADC	786	44.8	23
Montgomery			
GA	110	12.1	39
ADC	497	32.0	35
Stark			
GA	470	31.0	22
ADC	790	49.1	20
Union			
GA	40	88.8	1
ADC	101	81.4	1

*Among 45 counties

Summit's figures compared to similar counties as well as some of the smaller counties. Stark county is included because it is a neighboring county.

The Ohio Department of Human Services has hired Abt Associates, a consulting firm in Massachusetts, to compile data on a control group, which is 10% of the eligible JOBS clients who are not allowed to participate in the program. This is to measure how the group that does not participate in JOBS fares against the group that does, in terms of finding employment. McGrath did not have any of the statistics gathered by the firm. An Abt spokesman said the firm has not compiled its raw data yet.

The county also is not classifying clients by the duration of their stay on welfare. This makes it hard to measure whether clients who have found employment have shorter histories of being welfare clients than those who have not found employment.

Although the county has figures on the average wage for JOBS clients who have found employment, it does not keep figures on how many of these jobs have health benefits.

In working on this report, we managed to shed some light on two oft-repeated claims by county officials that had previously gone unchallenged.

One was a claim by county officials that between January and June 1990, 1,974 JOBS clients found employment. Out of these, they further claimed, 1,184 clients or 60%, have become employed as a result of the JOBS program. However, a spokeswoman for the Ohio Department of Human Services told the *Beacon Journal* that "there is no way for the (Ohio) department to tell the number of people who would have found jobs anyway without JOBS."

When asked how he arrived at the 1,184 figure, McGrath could not prove it. However, he said he believed that being enrolled in JOBS "stirred something up in that individual" that motivated a client to aggressively look for a job. "Who gets credit for it (the job) doesn't matter in my mind," McGrath added. The figure the agency can document is that its Job Development unit has so far found jobs for 435 clients.

Also, Summit County officials often have touted their JOBS program as the best in the state. They have claimed that the county has the best record in Ohio in the number of clients enrolled in the JOBS program and the number of JOBS clients who have found employment.

But quarterly performance reports for 1990, obtained from the state, showed that this is at best a half-truth. Summit does fare better than other counties when dealing with the sheer numbers of GA and AFDC clients enrolled and employed. But critics argue that this is because Summit has a large total eligible population. When Summit's enrollment and employment rate—the percent of people employed or enrolled in JOBS—is compared with other counties, it does not fare as well.

For instance, from July through September 1990, the last time for available figures, Summit had a GA enrollment rate of 30.6%, which ranked it 26th out of 45 JOBS counties. In this period, Summit placed 2,208 GA clients into JOBS—more than any of the other counties. But at 7,195 clients, it had a higher average GA case load to start off with.

McGrath said it is unfair to compare Summit's performance against smaller, rural counties that have smaller welfare populations. "The percentages in a way can be misleading. If you compare us to said, Allen County, they may have few JOBS personnel. The director himself could be taking applications."

But critics, such as Summit Councilman Paul Gallagher, dismiss that argument. They point out that counties get JOBS funding based on their size. "I think the stats are valid," Gallagher said. "Other smaller, more rural counties may not have that much industry. In Summit County thousands of people benefit from an industrial, commercial county. It's totally unfair to look at raw numbers of clients. And that's the path they were taking. By looking at the percentage of clients, you do get an accurate sense."

McGrath said a fairer comparison is to similar-sized counties such as Lucas and Montgomery. Compared to these, Summit's enrollment rate was significantly better. But Allio of the Catholic Commission disagreed. "Summit County clearly can't claim to be number one," he said Tom Allio. "In an overall look at their statistics their success has been mediocre to satisfactory at best."

"Clients are being brought and (they) are getting jobs. Whether it's at a rate and whether they're staying at the jobs long enough to justify the cost of the program, I don't know."

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BELLE GLADE:
Heavy on Referrals, Light on Jobs

by Christopher Boyd

> *"Project Independence simply doesn't work in rural areas. It doesn't provide them with the necessary training to improve their job skills because very little training is available in these places. . . . Where it exists, it often provides skills that aren't really useful. Really, how many beauticians does a farm community need?"*—welfare coalition spokeswoman

Starla Kalinghammer is 22 and the mother of six children. She has never married and has never worked. Though she ended her education in junior high school, she has an expert's understanding of the Florida welfare system, which has provided her with an income and a home for the past six years. "I live in a public housing project that's filled with women like me," she said one afternoon in February. "It's a lousy life. Most everybody waits around all day, keeping an eye out for the mailman and the next AFDC check."

Kalinghammer's frustration reached a limit early this year. She asked a welfare worker at the office of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) in Belle Glade about a new program that could help her get the training she needs to find work. Today, Kalinghammer attends the West County Vocational and Technical School, where she is studying to become a nurse's aide. She is among the first welfare mothers in the impoverished rural region south of Lake Okeechobee to enroll in Project Independence, Florida's effort to turn welfare recipients into employees.

However, critics already say the program's effectiveness is questionable. Job training is provided through a single vocational school in Belle Glade, so most Project Independence participants are acquiring similar skills. After graduation, they will confront a saturated employment market. If they cannot find a market for their skills —and it is expected they will not— they face the prospect of either moving away or returning to welfare.

Since Project Independence became law in 1987, HRS claims to have transformed more than 100,000 Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) mothers statewide into independent workers. The department projects that by September, 18,000 more welfare recipients will join the labor force. The goal is to help poor, unskilled women with children become self-sufficient.

Project Independence is primarily an urban program. Welfare mothers in Florida's cities are required to sign up. A wide variety of educational and job-training options are open to city-dwellers who are unable to find a job with the skills they possess. Those who refuse to register face loss of their welfare benefits. In most rural communities, the program is optional. Welfare offices in farm country generally are under-staffed, and job-training programs are rare.

Belle Glade: The Sweet and Sour

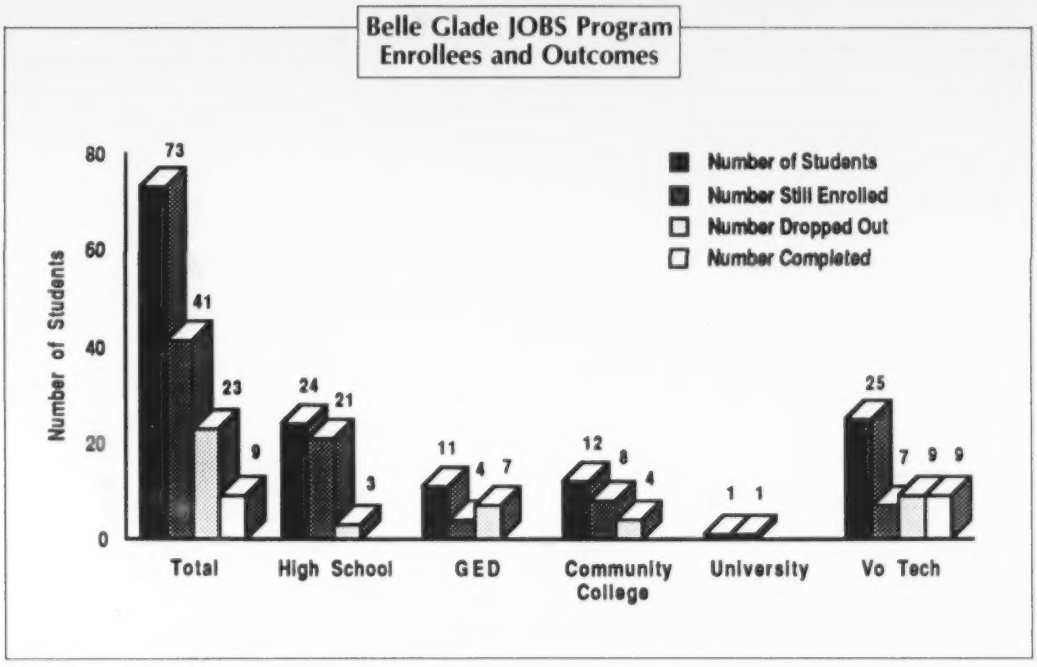
Belle Glade is considered rural. Its HRS office is at the center of the nation's most bountiful sugar cane-producing region. Each winter, the population of the town and surrounding small communities swells as migrant farmworkers arrive to harvest the cane crop. During the winter months, as many as 25,000 people fill the tenements of central Belle Glade, a crowded sink that has gained international attention for its skyrocketing number of AIDS cases.

Summer in the communities of western Palm Beach County is the economic flip side of winter. The migrants leave, and many of those who remain rely on food stamps and unemployment checks for survival. Jobs are very scarce. The lucky few who find them generally work at near-minimum wages in a handful of fast-food restaurants that dot Belle Glade's Main Street. It is not surprising, then, that HRS is Belle Glade's second largest employer. Though the community is isolated and agrarian, it has more in common with America's inner cities than with the nation's bread-basket farm towns. Many unmarried mothers are descendants of generations of unmarried mothers. For them, HRS is the family business.

The Project Independence goal is, in part, to break that cycle. But thus far, it has made little progress in Belle Glade. Though its HRS office handles one-third of the county's 1,300-1,400 AFDC cases, only 73 of the women receiving aid enrolled in the program. If Project Independence were mandatory in the community, more than 800 additional AFDC recipients would be compelled to enroll.

According to the county, of the 73 clients in adult training, 24 are teen parents enrolled in high school; 11 are in GED programs; 12 are at Palm Beach Community College; one is in the university system; and 25 are in vocational-technical schools. Of the high school students, three have dropped out and none have completed the program. Of the 11 GED students, seven have dropped out and four are still enrolled. Of those in the community college, four have dropped out and eight are still enrolled. The university student is still enrolled. And of the vocational-technical students, nine have dropped out, nine completed the program and seven are still enrolled. In reality, then, only 50 Belle Glade women were in the program or had completed it as of February 1991.

The program has three principal components: an adult section for women older than 19, a teen-parent section for mothers younger than 19 and a food stamp section. The first two sections are linked and operate in conjunction with AFDC. The third element affects anyone in the county receiving food stamps and requires that they look for work or enroll in school to continue on public assistance. The AFDC sections of the program are the most complex: their goal is to provide mothers with counseling, training and child care over an extended period of time.



Unlike its sister program in populous eastern Palm Beach County, the project in Belle Glade does not evaluate those who sign up. At an orientation meeting, the recruits are told about training that is available and referred to other agencies for assistance. Teenagers are encouraged to return to high school, where they can complete their studies and receive child care through the school board. The cost of their education is covered by the state school reimbursement formula. Older women are directed toward vocational training. The Palm Beach County school district does not differentiate Project Independence students from others. The state Department of Education covers their tuition with help from a federally subsidized Private Industry Council.

"The Project Independence students are indistinguishable from the rest of the student population," said Kate Gildan, the school district's director of vocational and technical education. "We find that they perform as well as any of our students, but if they don't, they're dropped out. We aren't concerned with what may have motivated them to be in our classrooms. Our teachers are never told they're in Project Independence, and unless the student shares that confidence, the teachers never know."

Will McTeire, director of Project Independence in Palm Beach County until early March, said little information is available on how the program is working in the county. It is new, he said, and most of those enrolled in the public school under the program have had less than six months of classes. McTeire said the staff in Belle Glade is too small to substantially evaluate the performance of those enrolled in training programs. The staff normally meets with the welfare mothers in an initial orientation meeting, then makes follow-up contacts once a month. One staffer, who is responsible for 40 teenagers in the program, makes a monthly visit to the high school where they are enrolled to make sure they are attending classes. Even so, McTeire said the staff is overworked.

"Right now, we have three staff people for more than 800 cases eligible for Project Independence," McTeire said. "We simply couldn't make the program mandatory at this time. However, we're hoping to get funding to double the size of the staff later this year. If all goes well, we'll have a mandatory program there by this fall."

That objective may be illusive. Just hours after McTeire spoke, he learned that his own job had been eliminated in a round of spending cuts. Under a new arrangement, Project Independence will now be grouped with a host of other HRS departments. Before that decision, Project Independence was under close scrutiny statewide. Administrators in Tallahassee were requiring local caseworkers to review all of their files in order to weed out welfare recipients who no longer qualify. Lucille McFarlane, a Project Independence staffer in Belle Glade, had case files piled high on her desk in late February as she talked about the program. "We have a number of women who enroll in Project Independence just to get the child care," she said. "They tell us they're going to school or they're working. As long as they are, we pay for day care. But a lot of times, we discover that they're sitting at home watching television while we're paying someone to look after their kids."

The Child Care Draw

To AFDC mothers, child care is one of the most attractive aspects of Project Independence. In Belle Glade, such care typically costs at least $70 a week per child. "Child care is the biggest service we have to offer right now," McFarlane said. "It's what gets a lot of women to volunteer." According to program officials, most of their budget in a sample month is spent on child care. In February, for example, child care fees

were paid for 34 mothers for a total of $10,880 or $259.05 per child ($60-80 per week). In the same month, the program spent $198 per student enrolled in community colleges. It usually does not pay transportation expenses (for only one participant currently).

Project Independence is supposed to pay for books, uniforms for work, tuition and transportation for participants. Yet in Belle Glade, the program seldom does. It operates as more of a referral service than a benefits office. "We rely on other agencies for funding whenever possible," McFarlane said. "I admit that transportation is a problem, but so far, only one person has asked us for anything more than a bus pass."

The program participants say their contact with the program caseworkers is sporatic. "As far as I'm concerned, Project Independence is just another word for a brush off," said Kalinghammer, the nurse's aide student. "All it is a place where you fill out a lot of papers. After that, they send you somewhere else, and that's where you get your help." That somewhere else is usually either the state Job Service offices or the Private Industry Council (PIC), a public/private organization operating under the aegis of the federal Job Training Partnership Act.

"After the Project Independence people sent me to PIC, I got the strong feeling that I would never see them again," Kalinghammer said. "So far, I've been right. PIC does everything. It pays my child care, it buys my books and it gives me my uniforms."

"They'll cut you off child care quicker than you know what's happening and you'll be worse off than you were before. That happened to my daughter two years ago. The way the system's set up, they make it harder on you financially to go to work than to stay home."

Caroline Reynolds, also studying to be a nurse's aide, agreed. The 43-year-old mother of three said Project Independence aid ends after PIC takes control. For those who find work through the employment office, Project Independence often does not follow through with promised day care assistance. "They tell you that they will continue to help you with child care if you find a job. They won't," she said. "They'll cut you off child care quicker than you know what's happening and you'll be worse off than you were before. That happened to my daughter two years ago. The way the system's set up, they make it harder on you financially to go to work than to stay home." Reynolds, it should be noted, was commenting on services before Project Independence.

Critical Studies

Single Mothers in Learning Environments (SMILE), a Central Florida coalition of welfare mothers, has tracked Project Independence's performance since its inception. The organization claims that women have been treated poorly throughout the state, especially in rural communities.

"Project Independence simply doesn't work in rural areas," said SMILE spokeswoman Catherine Moore. "It doesn't provide them with the necessary training to improve their job skills because very little training is available in these places. Where it exists, it often provides skills that aren't really useful. Data entry training programs often don't provide entry-level job skills. A lot of the rural vo-tech centers teach cosmetology. Really, how many beauticians does a farm community need?"

Charles McCloud, director of the PIC office in Belle Glade, concurred with the criticism of SMILE. Though his group oversees the training of most of Belle Glade's Project Independence participants, McCloud is doubtful of the results. "There have been a number of people who have gone through Project Independence and job training who end up back on welfare," McCloud said. "They may get a job as a nurse's aide and find that they have to support four or five kids on a $6.50-an-hour paycheck with no benefits. On welfare, at least they were entitled to Medicare, food stamps and an AFDC check. Working really leaves them in worse shape than when they started out."

McCloud said Project Independence should address Belle Glade's paucity of employment opportunities. "These people who come to us have the same motivations as those who live in the big cities," McCloud said. "Unfortunately, the economy here is totally different. This is a farming area. People work in the fields during the winter and go on food stamps during the summer. It's been that way for a very long time. What you have here is a small, rural place with the problems of a big, urban center."

Last fall, the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington, D.C., looked at Project Independence and programs in 29 other states funded through the federal JOBS act. It ranked Florida's initiative among the six worst job training programs.

Mark Greenberg, the center's director, said Florida's Project Independence is functioning poorly overall, and performing the worst in rural communities. "The thing that is striking about Florida is that it places a much stronger emphasis on job search and a much weaker emphasis on training programs," Greenberg said. Project Independence requires that a woman enter job search if she has worked for 12 of the last 36 months or has completed the equivalent of a 10th grade education. "Florida has 57% of its people in job search," Greenberg said. "The state with the next highest ratio has 25% in job search."

Because Belle Glade's program is optional, the number of mothers referred to the employment office is much smaller than in areas where the program is mandatory. Nevertheless, Greenberg is critical of the way job training is handled in Belle Glade. "If you look at how to set up a meaningful program in Belle Glade, you might consider spending more money on economic development to create jobs," Greenberg said. "The challenge in rural areas isn't to find ways to force AFDC mothers to look for jobs or to enroll in training programs. The challenge is to find ways to promote economic development. Otherwise, the training programs only prepare people to migrate somewhere else if they want work."

Cindy Huddleston, senior attorney with Florida Legal Services in Tallahassee, conducted an extensive study of how Project Independence is working in the state's farming communities. Her conclusions parallel those of Greenberg. "In rural areas, not many jobs exist and not much is being done to change that," she said. "HRS is mainly concerned with getting people off the welfare rolls and not about getting people into jobs. "I think that this program is one of the worst in the

nation," she said. "It is basically a job search program. All it does is force women out of the HRS office and into the Job Service office." For most AFDC mothers who encounter it, these critics say, Project Independence is no more than a referral program. It either steers them to another agency that coordinates training or to the employment service. "I'd say it's like Catch-22," said PIC's McCloud. "Project Independence says it's doing something, but they're really letting us do it for them. They send all their clients to us. We test them, place them, pay for their books, buy their clothes, pay their tuition, provide their child care and pay for their transportation. You might wonder what Project Independence is doing." In Belle Glade, it does little more than usher welfare recipients out of the system.

"That is our job," said former Project Independence director McTeire. "Our job is to be a referral source to help a person become self-sufficient. We get them started, follow up on them from time to time, and confront them if they're not making progress. If the person does not perform, we sanction them by taking away their child care, their AFDC check and their food stamps." He said the program operates on very little funding, so it is necessary to rely on other agencies to cover most of the cost of training and placement.

"Our staff is overworked right now," McTiere said. By bringing in other agencies to help, we contain our costs while we achieve results. We do the follow up, and when a person meets the state requirements for being job ready, we see to it that they look for work."

Some Successes

The program has its success stories. Connie Love, one of the two Project Independence workers in the Belle Glade office, was herself enrolled in the program two years ago following a divorce. Love was one credit short of finishing college at the time, and the program paid her to finish her degree. "I was embarrassed to be on AFDC," Love said. "I hated to cash my welfare check, and tried to make sure nobody I knew was watching when I did. But Project Independence helped me out of there and into a job."

Maggie Hodges, a 26-year-old unmarried mother of five, is another case that makes the program administrators proud. She received state tuition assistance last year to earn a high school graduation equivalency diploma (GED). Now, she is receiving aid to attend junior college. "Without Project Independence, there's no way I'd be able to do what I'm doing," she said. "They handled all of the financial stuff with the junior college. They also give me encouragement. It's hard to stay motivated when you live in the Glades. Most everybody is either hanging out or doing field work. Even if you want a job, it's real tough to find one." Because of that, Hodges said she probably will need to move to another town to find work after she completes her education. But she praised the program for giving her the skills to make that move.

Critics say cases such as Hodges' are rare and that Project Independence will have to be changed substantially if it is to have a meaningful impact on the lives of welfare recipients. Jim Clark, the statewide director of Project Independence, agreed that adjustments in the program are needed, but he defended the current strategy. "Yes, there are areas where we're weak, and these include the rural areas," he said. "But this is one of the best run welfare-to-jobs programs in the country, and it has been a model for other states. It's not true that we're simply trying to get people off the welfare rolls. In reality, we're educating more people than most of the other states with JOBS programs. In the long run, we're benefitting the people of this state."

Tips for Reporters

The Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services oversees Project Independence, the state's variant on the federal JOBS program. Like many bureaucracies in large states, it is unwieldy, and reporters find it hard to navigate.

When I began my report on Project Independence in Belle Glade, I turned to HRS in Dade County. I interviewed the Dade Project Independence director and recruited her help in setting up an interview with the Palm Beach County director, who supervises the Belle Glade HRS office. The Dade County interview was both a backgrounder and an entree to the HRS system.

Several days before my scheduled meeting with the Palm Beach director, I learned that his department was being audited, and he suggested we put off the interview for a month. I told him I had a deadline, and he referred me to the department media officer.

It took a week of repeated phone calls to get the media officer to respond. She explained she had been tied up. I then had to convince her that my work was worth her time. Finally, she agreed to help and arranged an interview for me with the two Project Independence case workers in Belle Glade.

The next obstacle was making contact with participants in the program. HRS holds their names in confidence. The Belle Glade case workers offered to ask four participants to meet me at their office for an interview. Relying on their hand-picked candidates did not suit me well, but it was a starting point.

Only one of the four women arrived at the HRS office for the interview. She was, as I had expected, extremely positive about the program. I decided I needed to speak with other participants, and I wanted a group that had not been screened by the welfare agency.

Though gaining access to schools is often complicated in a city, the problem did not exist in Belle Glade. I simply walked into the vocational/technical school where many Project Independence participants were enrolled. I was able to enter a classroom there and talked the teacher into letting me take four women to a conference room for an interview.

Project Independence in Belle Glade is less than a year old, is voluntary and has about 50 current participants. In short, hardly any one in town has heard of it. Nevertheless, I recommend the following procedure for researching a story on JOBS in a rural setting:

- Call the local legal services office. Normally, they have heard of the program and they may have had a client who was enrolled in it. In my research, legal services referred me to two good sources: Project SMILE (Tel: (407) 889-0100), a private group that represents welfare mothers in rural central Florida; and Florida Legal Services (Tel: (904) 385-7900), which has a staff member in Tallahassee who is an expert on the program.
- Call the churches. I was unable to find a church in Belle Glade familiar with the project, but it is worth a try.
- Call the school board and find out who handles vocational training and teenage parents.
- Contact the local Private Industry Council. These are local

arms of the Job Training Partnership Act program, and many are working hand-in-hand with the JOBS program.

- Check the local junior college's administrative offices.
- Contact national organizations familiar with the program.

I found that Mark Greenberg with the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington (Tel: (202) 328-5140) is a good source.

In Florida, it is difficult getting numbers from HRS. Project Independence is so fragmented that little meaningful information is available on costs per participant. Whenever possible, Project Independence sends its conscripts to other agencies and relies on them to pay the costs. Still, Project Independence Director Jim Clark had financial figures for the state, and local district managers can provide statistics on spending.

I was unable to get an accurate picture of spending in Belle Glade for two reasons: First, it is lumped together with the rest of Palm Beach County for bookkeeping purposes; second, the majority of costs associated with the program are covered by the Private Industry Council and the state reimbursement to the Palm Beach County School District.

"If you look at how to set up a meaningful program in Belle Glade, you might consider spending more money on economic development to create jobs. The challenge in rural areas isn't to find ways to force AFDC mothers to look for jobs or to enroll in training programs. The challenge is to find ways to promote economic development. Otherwise, the training programs only prepare people to migrate somewhere else if they want work."

PHOTO BY TIM ARCHIBALD/TUCSON WEEKLY

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PART 2

REPORTING ON LITERACY: Is There a "Literacy/Basic Skills" System?

"The community isn't sufficiently concerned. The biggest problem is convincing people there is a problem."—director, Westchester, N.Y. Urban League

"I'm better educated than most of the men I work with and I've got the experience, but I can't be too sure I'll get the job. If I don't, I'll still need computer skills. That's the future. Computer is something I've got to know."—43 year-old manager and student, Laurel, Miss.

Adult literacy has been elevated from a little-discussed education problem to a national goal in the span of only a few years of public debate. For the first time, more sophisticated measurements of literacy skills have determined that the number of adults without the skills to function adequately in society or in traditional jobs is quite large. Compounding the problem are changes in the workplace, requiring workers to have the type of skills that they not only have not used in the past but, in most instances, never learned in their own schooling.

According to the most recent and reliable estimate of adult literacy (U.S. Department of Education/1987), about 27% of adults do not have adequate literacy skills to function in society. The problem extends even to managerial, professional and technical employees; 11% of them are estimated to lack essential literacy skills.

Yet, the nation's governors and the Bush Administration have declared that every adult will have the literacy skills to be employable and productive by the year 2000.

Is there a system in place to achieve that? How do adults find out about literacy or basic skills programs? How do they access them and who pays for further education? Are the programs traditionally oriented or do they use progressive instructional techniques and provide a curriculum geared to present needs? Is the business sector part of the literacy loop? Do adults actually need the higher skills so often cited by policymakers and the business community?

For adults who are not receiving public assistance (the new JOBS program has been shaped for those dependent on welfare), locating and finding time for, paying for and translating literacy training into greater job security are formidable barriers. How are adults coping with new demands upon their abilities?

The Education Writers Association asked reporters in three diverse locations to find out what opportunities are available to adults in their communities to acquire greater literacy skills. In affluent Westchester County, N.Y., heavily-Hispanic Tucson, Ariz., and rural Laurel, Miss., the reporters found systems—and sub-systems.

The articles by the reporters reveal some provocative trends:

- *Adults are motivated by their own goals to seek out literacy/training programs.* When efforts click—the programs meet specific skill needs, they are conveniently accessible, and employers help with the cost—adults willingly participate in literacy training. This contrasts with problems with motivation found among some of those attending education/training programs under the JOBS program, as described by other reporters covering that effort.
- *Programs primarily benefit those who have enough basic skills to enroll for advanced training, such as computer applications, or who enter training to further their career goals.* As the working world changes, more and more adults need help with reading and writing for communicating with others on the job, math applications for planning work and monitoring equipment, and computer skills. These also are the areas most likely to have educational costs covered by employers.
- *Those with poor basic skills have the most difficulty entering the adult education system, for various reasons.* Consequently, they are most in peril of falling even further behind in the economy. Basic skills training appears to be heavily dependent upon volunteer tutoring or traditional classroom-like environments—that is, they lack sophisticated ways of helping adults move through literacy programs quickly (computer-based systems have more success). Because of their own heavy work schedules, these adults find it difficult to enroll in programs unless they are offered at the worksite. Also, the skills gap between adults without adequate basic skills and the needs of the workplace is so large that there is no assurance their effort will pay off. On the other hand, employers are sensitive to those workers or potential workers who have the "right" attitudes and motivation, even though they lack basic skills—as evidenced by investments in those with limited English skills in the Tucson area.
- *Some communities have many systems, offering literacy skills training at different levels and for adults with different needs.* In fact, the programs often seem to duplicate each others' efforts, but program providers see multiple opportunities as a plus for adults. However, they sometimes admit that a directory and clearinghouse would be helpful. Also, the more sophisticated literacy programs and those geared to specific occupational training and upgrading really reach very few adults, compared to the number needing literacy help.
- *Forward-thinking employers in the examples described by the reporters are playing key roles in furthering the skills of adult workers.* However, there are not enough of them, particularly among small businesses. Furthermore, their investments primarily are in current workers with the skills to benefit from additional education. In a program for computer skills in Mississippi,

for example, only three of 55 enrollees were attending with financial assistance from their employers.

- *Even with larger employers, there is a long way to go in convincing them of the need to take on responsibility for upgrading skills of employees.* In Westchester, for example, employer representatives were reluctant to talk about their needs, reporting that they rely on screening to take care of skill needs from the beginning. Elsewhere, employers appeared to be resting on borrowed time, expecting to rely on a large number of well-educated workers to take entry jobs.
- *Despite the expanded campaign to alert adults to the existence of programs, most enrollees hear about programs from friends, or in some instances from employers.* Counseling and direction services appear limited, particularly in helping individuals match programs to their own needs. Barriers to enrollment, then, are both structural and psychological: not enough programs exist, they are not located close to work or home, there is inadequate transportation and child care, not enough counseling is provided, and programs are presented in a fashion which allows individuals to say, "that's not me." All of the adults interviewed by reporters had jobs, but the adult education system—for "literacy and basic skills"—for the most part, is not closely connected to the needs of working adults.

Tips for Reporters

- *Understand the breadth of the problem before starting your interviews.* While all of the people reporters interviewed were working, their needs varied greatly and from community to community. Four groups appeared in this work: adults who read little or not at all (the smallest group), those looking to upgrade their literacy and basic skills (reading and writing skills, basic math), those who needed help learning English (who might be either well-educated or illiterate in their own language), and those whose jobs were requiring much different skills (computer applications and communications skills).
- *Be aware of the concerns about language.* There is no agreement on terms or definitions. While many may call all of these needs "literacy", all three reporters had difficulty with terminology. "Basic skills," "literacy," "workplace education," "workforce education" are used by different programs and groups—understand the differences.
- *Push to get data on your community's profile.* No good data exist, with the exception of a few states that have done their own surveys (Mississippi and Oregon). But help is on the way. A national adult literacy survey is being field tested now, with the first data available in 1993; and the National Education Goals Panel is expected to require states to conduct similar surveys. At the very least, get your local literacy leaders to estimate the numbers who need ESL programs, basic skills or intermediate literacy programs, or occupational training, and those who cannot read at all. For state level information, start with the economic development department or office and then branch out to unemployment, welfare, education and job training offices. Governors in six states -Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi and South Carolina—have literacy offices that can be one-stop shopping centers for literacy and job training statistics.
- *Define the group you are covering.* Even limiting coverage to those in the workforce who need 'skill' upgrading, as we did, left reporters with too much to cover and too complicated a picture. But it is important to understand that choosing one or two people or, for example, those who need ESL programs is only part of the picture. One of the reasons the "literacy problem" is so hard to get a handle on is that the "literacy" needs of the U.S. vary from the small number who cannot read at all to those workers whose jobs have changed dramatically. Several of the reporters suggested building coverage around large employers.
- *Defining the problem by programs that exist probably will not work.* A patchwork quilt exists in literacy adult education, varying from the JOBS program for welfare clients, the Job Training Partnership Act for unemployed poor, voluntary adult literacy programs for those with very poor basic skills, adult education programs which depend on who runs them and how they define the needs. As one community reported, a good GED system was in place but what existed for upgrading skills of workers was very limited.
- *Ask about the connections between the programs and employers and learners' needs.* Is there an understood plan for meeting community needs that has been updated recently? Do the programs work directly with employers in developing new programs? Does a community coalition for literacy and basic skills exist and meet? Talk to the Chamber of Commerce, the Private Industry Council, churches and pastors.
- *Find out if adults think programs meet their needs.* Go to where adults can get their needs met—community colleges, adult education programs; and to where employees may gather, such as union halls. Go to community-based programs that run training programs.

Sources

American Society for Training and Development, Tony Carnevale, 1630 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22313; (703) 683-8150.

Business Council for Effective Literacy, Gail Spangenberg, 1221 Avenue of the Americas, 35th Floor, New York, NY 10020; (212) 512-2415.

Education Writers Association, Lisa Walker or Anne Lewis, 1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 429-9680.

Mississippi Governor's Office of Literacy, Karl Haigler, Box 139, Jackson, MS 39205; (601) 359-2673.

National Adult Literacy Survey, Irwin Kirsch or Jules Goodison (special populations), Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ; (800) 223-0267.

National Center on Education and the Economy, Rochester, New York; (716) 546-7620. Publisher of **America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages;** also its author, Ira Magaziner, SJS, Inc., 56 Pine St., Providence, RI 02903; (401) 421-5990.

National Governors Association, Robert Silvanik, Adult Literacy Initiative, 444 North Capitol St., Washington, DC 20001; (202) 624-5300.

Tom Sticht, researcher on teaching literacy through job contexts, Applied Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences, Inc., P.O. Box 6640, San Diego, CA 92106; (619) 224-2810.

Questions to Ask

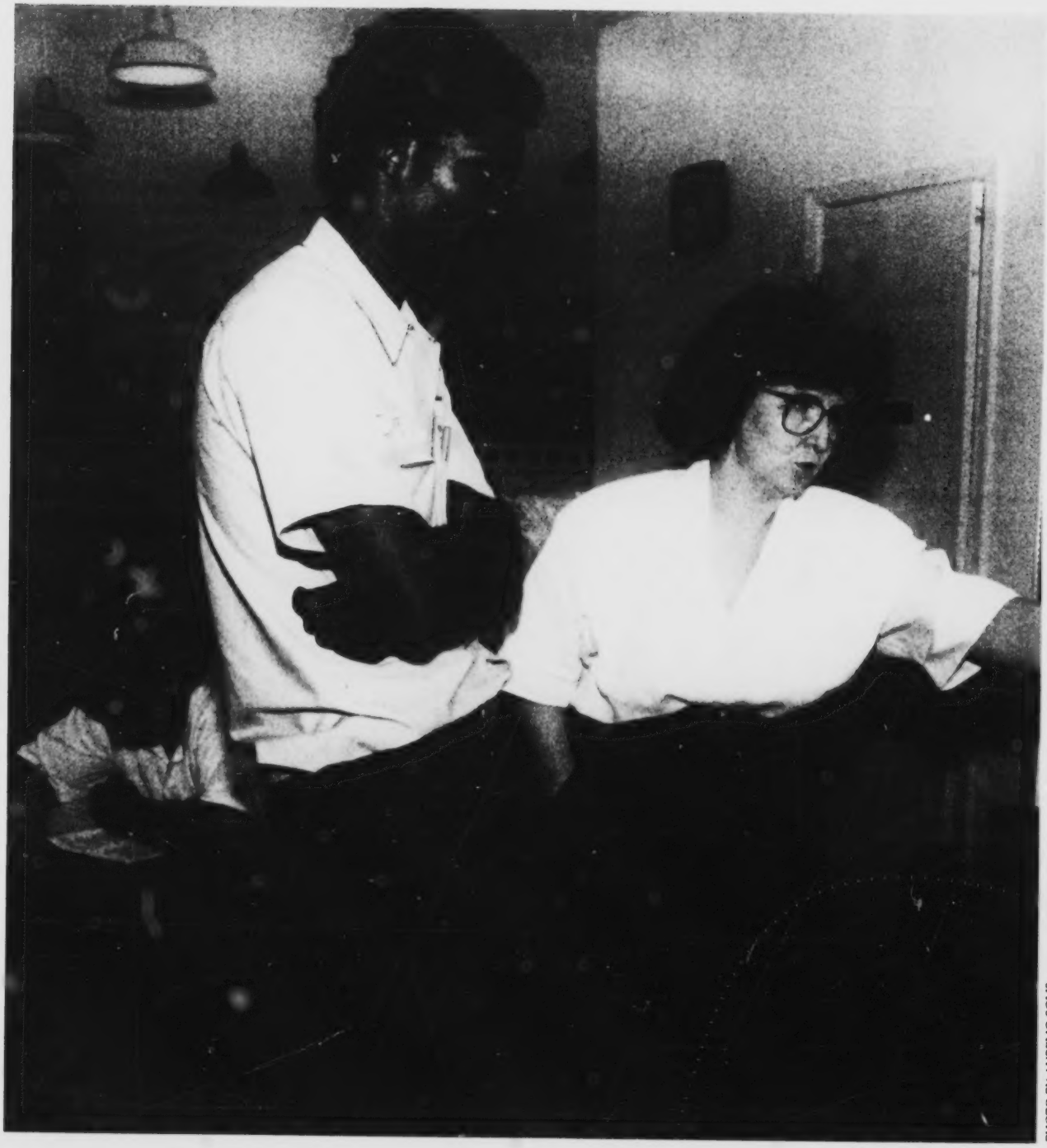
The Workplace: How are job skill demands on employees changing? Are local or state businesses undergoing massive upgrading in terms of installing more high-tech equipment, computers, etc? How are the companies helping their former employees adjust? How much money are they investing in training to upgrade employee skills? Do employees have a ready foundation of basic literacy skills? Do labor unions push for literacy, skills upgrading or other educational opportunities for workers?

The Community/County/State: What is the history of the area? Has it undergone major shifts in employment before, say from farming to industry to service? How supportive is local/state government of business efforts to upgrade workers' skill levels? Are tax credits or grants available? Is there cooperation among governmental, educational and industrial leaders? How has the local/state economy changed over the years? What are the reasons?

Literacy Projects: How are they organized? Do multiple programs operate separately or under a single umbrella—or is there is single coordinated effort? How stable and adequate is funding? Is it local, state or federal? How are volunteers recruited and trained? How effective and usable are materials? Is there enough to meet the demand? How suitable are sites for classes and tutoring sessions? Are results measured and made available to the media? How do literacy programs reach those who need the services? What do volunteers and clients say about the effectiveness of the program? Why did they get involved? How did they find out about the program? Does that match with what coordinators and organizers say?

What kind of internal review is in place? Are clients obtaining skills necessary for them to reach their personal goals, to get a job, obtain a GED diploma? What percentage continue from literacy programs into adult basic education classes? Are counseling services available for literacy, GED students? What cooperation is there between literacy projects and other social service organizations?

—compiled by Lea Anne Brandon and Reagan Walker



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LAUREL: Adjusting Again to Higher Skills

by Lea Anne Brandon and Reagan Walker

"In this company, I feel like knowing how to use Lotus will open a wide range of opportunities. I took typing here when I needed to improve that, and I just might take another class."
—secretary and student in the R.H. Watkins Voc Tech Center computer applications class

David Tucker's dreams of a gold pocketwatch were shattered on an ominously overcast November morning in 1989. On that day, Masonite Corporation, Tucker's employer for 17 years, announced it would spend $50 million to reconfigure and modernize its 60-year-old Laurel hardboard plant.

Demolished would be the spiraling brick smokestacks that belched acrid white steam. Gone would be about 250 manual labor, production line jobs, including Tucker's. And spoiled were the 43-year-old unit manager's plans to retire from the hardboard mill that had grown up in his own backyard. "It kind of gets to you when they say your job is obsolete," said Tucker, a somewhat shy husband and father who holds a high school diploma and has completed some junior college work. "I felt like the past 17 years of my life weren't worth much. . . . It's tough for a man my age to go out and find a new job."

Masonite's announcement rattled the entire Laurel community, which was already staggering from the collapse of the oil and gas industry in the late 1980s. The town's economic backbone was breaking.

It was at Laurel a small south Mississippi community in the thick of the state's piney woods—graced by brick streets canopied with overhanging oak trees and colored with huge, bright pink azalea bushes—that local inventor William Mason in 1922 produced the first commercial hardboard. Stained and textured to resemble various types of wood paneling, it is an economical interior wallcovering. His invention, which almost overnight replaced the railroad as Laurel's industrial flagship, is made by exploding wood fibers and flattening them under steam pressure.

But the 1989 layoffs effectively dethroned Masonite from its position as Laurel's leading employer and economic mainstay. The plant's employees, before the layoffs, had made up about 5% of the total workforce in Jones County. The Laurel mill, which was last updated in the 1950s, produced 26% of the nation's hardboard siding. At its heyday, the plant employed more than 3,700 workers.

In announcing the layoffs, Masonite officials told workers the changes were necessitated because the mill was outdated and the demand for hardboard was decreasing. "We're becoming a more high-tech facility. It is going to be more computerized in that the person doesn't have to make decisions anymore. You have just got to know how to work the computer that does it all," said Dennis Miller, spokesman for International Paper Co., which bought the plant in 1988. "Our employees, the ones we keep on, are going to need skills they never would have dreamed of needing in their old jobs. We're making things more efficient, but that also means we don't need 100 people just to drive forklifts and move sheets of hardboard from one place to another." But what still rings in workers' ears is the message that they did not have the right skills to work in what will be Masonite's shiny, modern plant.

Low Skills

Tucker's experience mirrors that of workers across Mississippi and the nation. As the economy shifts away from low-wage, low-skill jobs in mass production and agriculture to technical-based jobs in manufacturing and service industries, workers have been forced to upgrade skills or get out of the labor pool. In Mississippi, ranked 48th in educational attainment, that transition will be more difficult than for other states.

Even those with education, like Tucker, find it has not prepared them for the changes that will usher the state and nation into the 21st century. Tucker's longevity with the company qualified him to compete this summer for 108 newly created computer-assisted jobs. He takes only a little solace in that opportunity. In January, Tucker shook off his apprehension, tore out an ad in the *Laurel Leader-Call* and drove over to the Vo-Tech Center at the R.H. Watkins High School to enroll in a twice-a-week, adult education night class in computer applications.

"I'm better educated than most of the men I work with and I've got the experience, but I can't be too sure I'll get the job. If I don't, I'll still need computer skills. That's the future," Tucker said during a 15-minute class break in the school's new vocational education building. "Computer is something I've got to know." Tucker, who is paying the $60 tuition for the 10-week class from his own wallet, will get another 57 hours of job skills training in March and April provided by Masonite to screen the hundreds of new applicants and former employees competing for the 108 new jobs.

If he qualifies for one of the new slots by doing well in that class, he will receive another 80 to 120 hours of specialized training—also at the company's expense. If he successfully completes that course, he will have a job that guarantees annual upgrading training and other educational benefits. He also will win another chance to collect that gold watch.

But, for now, Tucker wants every "leg up" that he can find. That is why he is relying so hard on the adult education classes offered year-round at Watkins. His classmates, most of whom have jobs but are eyeing a career ladder climb, have their own reasons for choosing among the 100-plus classes offered each semester at the two-story red brick building adjacent to the city high school.

"My boss told me to," said Fred Chancellor, who sells burial insurance policies for Colonial Chapel Funeral Homes in Lau-

Literacy In Mississippi

- Of Mississippians 16 years and older 714,000 are not enrolled in school and do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. This represents about 45% of the total population age 16 and above.
- Of the state's total population, 27% (or 400,000 people) has less then a ninth-grade education.
- In the 1988-89 school year 7,316 students, or 5.6% of the total state high school enrollment, dropped out of school. Mississippi's overall high school dropout rate is 36%.
- Dropouts constitute approximately 62% of Mississippi's state prison population, representing almost 5,000 inmates.
- Approximately 27,500 adult Mississippians are currently served by the literacy and adult education public or private programs available statewide.
- More than 80,000 of Mississippi's one-million plus jobs are directly linked to export markets.
- Mississippi has about 300,000 adults below the poverty level and 60,000 adults who depend on welfare payments.

rel. He's taking a "Lotus Basic" class every Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6 to 10 p.m. That makes for a long day after working 9-to-5 in the mortuary business. "Everything we're doing now is on computer. I have a lap-top that I use when I'm on the road in sales. All our bookkeeping and records are done with Lotus," he said.

Three of his 55 co-workers are taking the same class at their employer's urging and expense. And Chancellor and his wife already have signed up for "Lotus Advanced" that starts this spring. Two PCs away, Paul Patel of Hattiesburg struggles with a spreadsheet program in his Lotus classwork. He and two other friends drive about 30 miles to Laurel twice-a-week for the class. Patel bought a personal computer at Christmas, and he wants to put his 35-unit motel's financial records on its five-inch disc. Lotus is the program he bought with the computer. "I don't feel competent enough yet to convert everything to computer, but they say my bookwork will be easier when we do," he said.

Across the carpeted hallway from where Tucker is studying, Lula Holifield squints at her PC screen. During the day she works as a secretary at Waste Management of Mississippi in Ellisville, about six miles south of Laurel. Married and the mother of three school-age children, she signed up for the four-week Lotus course because that is the program used at work. "Some of us who don't usually work on it thought it would be a good idea to learn. It was our idea, but our company agreed to pay for the class. We just wanted to improve ourselves," Holifield said. "In this company, I feel like knowing how to use Lotus will open a wide range of opportunities. I took typing here when I needed to improve that, and I just might take another class," said Holifield, whose company is paying her tuition.

Jamie Reeves, 30, has one 18-month old child and a husband who is the band director at Watkins High, the same school where she studies computer two nights a week. As a secretary at the Otis Engineering Corporation in Sandersville, she uses Lotus some on the job. "I have a selfish reason for taking this course. It looks good on a resume. My company is helping with the cost, and that's a good incentive. Lotus is used more up in management," she said. "When I graduated from high school 10 years ago, we had some word processing and computer skills but it was very early then. Now, if you want to keep up and compete for better jobs, you have to have computer experience," Reeves said.

The night classes do incur a cost. "I get off at 5 and I have to be here at 6. It's hard on my husband, because he takes care of the kids," Reeves said. But they also have benefits. "From my view, my lifestyle can't be obtained on one salary. I also want to give my child opportunities and the things I feel she should have. We need both incomes. To be able to advance, you need to improve skills, especially with computer application. Companies need to put forth more of an effort. They forget that everything they want done, they delegate," she added.

Laurel Legacy

Changes that workers like Tucker, Holifield and Reeves are going through to meet market demands mirror those Jones County dwellers have experienced before. Fiercely proud of its reputation as "The Free State of Jones" that grew from its Civil War-era population's attempt to secede from the Confederacy in protest against fighting a war over slavery, the community's ever-changing, fluctuating economy has forced residents to adapt. After the New Orleans and Northeastern Railway laid track through the county in the 1880s, milling of the virgin yellow pine forests took root.

In 1901, the Mississippi Knitting Mills began operation with a capacity of 125 dozen socks and stockings a day and a payroll of 45 employees; the Lindsey Wagon Company, financed by $50,000 in lumber money, was founded to produce a locally invented eight-wheel lumber wagon. By 1925, there were 53 industries operating in Laurel with an estimated monthly payroll of $500,000. Lumber continued, however, to be dominant with its local mills producing almost one million feet of lumber daily.

And in 1939, just as the raping of the virgin forests was beginning to strip bare the acreage surrounding Laurel, oil was discovered at nearby Heideberg, prompting exploration and subsequent discoveries in Jones and surrounding counties. As a result, Laurel shed its backwoods pulpwood image to became a major base of operation for petroleum service and supply companies.

At the pinnacle of the oil boom of the 1980s, these firms numbered some 300 in Laurel. Oil was king. But then came the oil recession and, almost overnight, there were fewer drilling projects to service from a high of 81 in 1981 to less than a dozen today.

Unemployment in January stood at 6.5%, practically the same as the 1990 yearly average of 6.6% and in line with the statewide average. "One of the problems we have in Laurel is that our unemployed people have left the county. When their

jobs are gone, they just pack up and move so the statistics really give us a false reading on how well we are doing," said Carey Smith, Mississippi Employment Security Service's Laurel office manager.

That exodus has resulted in a current population of 18,827 residents as compared to a high of more than 30,000 when both Masonite and the oil industry were operating at full steam. City sales tax collections are sliding. February 1991 collections were $478,660 as compared to almost $500,000 in February 1990. Statewide, sagging tax collections are expected to cause a $105 million shortfall in the state government's $2 billion budget for fiscal year 1991.

Changing Workplaces

Masonite is not the only workplace where Laurel workers find themselves unprepared and unskilled for industry's high-tech conversion. Far from it. There is Sanderson Farms, Inc., a chicken processing company founded and owned by the hometown Sanderson family. Rapidly changing from the hand-plucked chicken processing company begun 44 years ago, Sanderson's is now marketing its Miss Goldy chicken in much of the United States and last year launched a line of regionally marketed, microwaveable, family-sized meals. The company, which had a net income of $15.2 million last year and employs about 2,100 workers, also provides much of the white meat for McDonald Corporation's McChicken filet sandwiches, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Popeye's restaurants. "Most of the changes we have seen have been in the areas where we'd been doing a lot of manual stuff. The work formerly done by employees is now being done by machines, and the employees have to know how to operate those machines," said Jessie Walters, director of personnel services. "When we make some kind of change in the operation, we provide training."

Laurel's largest and fastest growing employer is now Howard Industries Inc., funded by Billy Howard of Laurel. Howard is one of the nation's four largest electric transformer producers, employing about 1,200 workers. The company this year will spend about $3,500 in tuition payments to Watkins' Vo-Tech program to retrain workers and upgrade employees' skills in welding, computer operations and management. "There is a lot of automation in our production facility right now. Where we used to use muscle to push the items up and down the line, now it is computerized," said Tyron Hicks, employment administrator. "A person who was not used to all the computers would have to be trained." Howard also offers on-site workplace classes for workers needing literacy tutoring to improve reading and math skills. This spring, the company is providing adult basic education classes to help employees prepare for the GED exam. Classes will be arranged around work shifts.

This summer, Masonite will open an on-site human resource/education center to provide employees with a self-paced computerized instructional system to improve reading, math and job skills. The company has determined that for an employee to be able to operate the newly installed equipment, he or she must read on at least a ninth-grade level.

Howard and Masonite are two of only a handful of companies in Laurel that provide workplace training. Even so, the companies rely on the Watkins center to fill in many gaps. "It costs a lot to train workers, but it doesn't cost our employees anything," Hicks said of Howard's arrangement with Watkins. A Howard employee, for example, can qualify for a 40-cent-per-hour pay increase by successfully taking a six-week welding course offered at Watkins and paid for by Howard.

Dewey Blackledge, director of community and adult education for the Laurel school district, said Howard and other larger companies are steady clients, but most of his classes are filled by smaller companies like a four-partner law firm needing a word processing class for its secretarial pool. "I end up going out to the businesses and asking them what they need. We have to let them know it is our job to provide that kind of service," Blackledge said.

The 1991 spring schedule at Watkins reflects the diversity of the area's training needs. Operating with a $75,000 annual budget, with $25,000 coming from federal adult education funds and the rest from tuition and local sources, Watkins' adult vocational education program offers business, industrial and dental/health courses. Computer classes, beginning and advanced, are the most popular of the 100 offerings at the Watkins Vo-Tech center. "Our courses are always changing to reflect the demands," said Blackledge.

Companies and small businesses in Laurel can also turn to one of 15 two-year colleges across the state that provide numerous degree and training opportunities. Jones County Junior College not only provides a range of training courses on its Ellisville campus, about 10 miles from Watkins, but also will tailor training programs at the worksite. For example, the Southwest Central Medical Center relies on the college to train its emergency medical technicians. Classes are provided at both the hospital and on campus.

The junior college also will be providing some on-site training at Masonite as it makes its changeover. "We are trying to help our economy and help the businesses in our area be competitive," said George Pollitz, the junior college's vo-tech industrial services coordinator. "And we certainly want to help people keep jobs. Usually a company contacts the junior college," Pollitz said, adding, "the biggest benefit to using the junior college is the convenience, and it's much cheaper than hiring private trainers." Each of Mississippi's 15 community and junior colleges has an industrial services coordinator who reaches out to area businesses to provide such training.

Basic Skills First

But for many workers and those without jobs in Laurel, the courses at Jones Junior College or the Watkins Vo-Tech Center are too difficult. For them, it is a question of acquiring skills rather than upgrading them.

In Mississippi, 27% of the workforce has less than nine years of education. Figures on the unemployed were not available. And with a 36% school dropout rate, the statistics do not stand a good chance of improving in the next few years. In Laurel, one in five adults cannot read past an elementary school level. About 45% of Jones Countians have not earned a high school diploma. Only a fraction of those make their way to Laurel's downtown Sawmill Mall once or twice a week for basic skills classes in a carpeted, cavernous storefront that once housed the mall's cafeteria.

On one rainy Tuesday evening in February about a dozen men, most in their late 20s or early 30s and all wearing baseball caps with varying ensignia and slogans, hunker down around two eight-foot folding tables set up in one corner of the room. "Tonight, we're starting on our journals. We're not going to

grade it, but I want y'all to write a paragraph. Tell me about yourself, what you do or what you want to do," said Sue Granfield, tutor for the GED-preparation class. Her students, who reluctantly began scratching away in their wirebound notebooks, were not attending class voluntarily. All had been found or pleaded guilty to a non-violent crime and had been ordered to complete at least 400 hours of basic education by a Jones County judge as a stipulation for parole.

Greg, star pupil of the class who is almost ready to tackle the GED exam, finishes his assignment first. "Hush. I'll read mine," he said, pushing back the brim of a black mesh cap. Hesitantly, he haltingly recites his just-written prose: "My home is on First Avenue. It is large and white. It needs remodeling and it needs a new roof. But it is paid for."

Granfield immediately praises her students for their efforts, tells them to close their journals and pick up their workbooks for a review of the parts of speech. "We work on the areas we will see later on the GED test in math, writing, language skills," Granfield said during a class break. "It's hard for them to concentrate when they first get here because most of them have been working all day and they haven't had time to unwind."

The "Institutional Literacy" classes, funded by a $19,000 annual grant from the state Department of Education, offer literacy and adult basic education classes to clients assigned to the program by local courts. City and county judges, on the recommendation of the district attorney's office, order persons found guilty of certain non-violent crimes to complete education classes to qualify for parole.

Across the dimly lit room, Lester Hughes, a pastor from Soso, works with another group of students who have been assigned to literacy courses by the city court for misdemeanor offenses. Many of Hughes' students have been picked up for not having a driver's license, so he spends half of his three-hour lesson teaching them how to read a driver's manual and preparing them for the driver's test.

While the institutional classes continue until nearly 10 that night, an elderly gentleman helped a 42-year-old feed mill worker learn to read in a one-on-one session in another mall office home base for the five-year-old Laurel Program for Adult Literacy.

"I heard about the classes on the radio," said James Knotts. "I work as a maintenance worker at a feed mill and my boss said I needed to read to move up." His tutor, Wyatt Brumfield, 63, said he talked with Knotts' boss at church and volunteered to help. "I'm retired and I wanted to get a literacy program going at our church," Brumfield said. "I decided I had better get trained and get some experience first."

Kathy Aaron, literacy project coordinator, said the mall location isn't threatening. "Most of our clients have had a bad experience somewhere down the line with school so, really, that is the last place they would ever want to go." The rose-colored carpet, hand-quilted wall hangings and soft potpourri that scent the literacy office have turned the center into a homey haven for the hundreds of faces that Aaron refers to as her children. Started in 1985, the literacy program is financed by a $89,999 federal grant funneled through the Mississippi Governor's Office for Literacy. "If something ever happened to that office, I don't know what would happen to us," Aaron said.

Aaron said that four years ago she would have bragged that her office was making a difference in Laurel. Today, she is almost overcome by the need. "We have only scratched the surface. These people need so much." Flipping through manila folders overflowing a gray four-door filing cabinet in the mall office, Aaron smiles as she comes to a particularly dog-eared file. "She's our prize pupil," Aaron said, pulling out Sadie Smith's records. Forced to drop out of elementary school in the second grade to take care of her younger brothers and sisters for her ailing mother, Smith spent the rest of her childhood and teenage years in an adult role. After her siblings had all finished school and moved out of the house, Smith was embarrassed to return to school. She married young. Her husband also was illiterate. Despite their educational handicaps, the Smiths both worked two jobs to put their three children through school and college.

This spring, their youngest daughter received a teaching degree from the University of Southern Mississippi. Her graduation present from Smith: "I read her a book. I read it at my mom's 70th birthday too. They were both so proud," said Smith, who enrolled in the adult literacy classes two years ago.

Statewide Coordination

Basic literacy programs, such as one at the Sawmill Mall in Laurel, have undergone a transformation in the last three years. In 1988, Gov. Ray Mabus created the Governor's Office of Literacy and set a goal of having nine out of every 10 Mississippians at the functional literacy level by the year 2000. Mabus' wife, Julie, has become the state's strongest literacy advocate, and she works closely with Karl Haigler, who came to Mississippi from his post as director of adult education at the U.S. Department of Education. He was lured to Mississippi by the governor's challenge.

One of the first things Haigler did was to instruct local literacy programs receiving federal funding—funneled through various state agencies—to begin developing "individual education plans" for each student. Such plans, known as IEPs, are a borrowed practice from the special education field. "We had people coming into programs who wanted to know how to use the driver's manual and two years later, they still couldn't read a driver's manual," Haigler said. "You need to start with the things people want to know and work from there," Haigler said.

One of the driving reasons behind the IEPs was the dismal completion rates of adult students. In 1987, only 7% of adult students stuck with a program long enough to show a measurable increase in skills. In 1990, 70% completed programs and moved on to more difficult courses or the job market. At the same time, the cost for each student dropped from about $4,100 to about $1,300. "The governor told me he wanted to throw money at the problem, but he wanted literacy programs to be accountable for results," Haigler said.

The Office itself is funded through a special 8% set aside in the federal Job Training Partnership Act, but it helps coordinate all funds coming into the state for adult education. About $2.5 million annually comes to the state through various education and job training programs. The state only chips in about $180,000 for adult education projects. To boost funding for projects, the Office also works with the Mississippi Literacy Foundation, which has parceled out about $90,000 in donations for special literacy projects around the state.

Haigler said the objective of the office is not to reduce the number of literacy options, which in any given community can include programs run by community colleges, vo/tech centers,

community-based organizations, churches and civic organizations. "You don't increase access by reducing the number of programs," he said. Instead, the goal of the governor's office is to get the various programs to work together in a more comprehensive manner.

Assessing Skills

One of the more innovative projects the Office of Literacy has undertaken is a statewide assessment of adult literacy. The project is one of only two in the nation and will likely serve as a model for other states. In 1990, the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University interviewed 1,803 adults in their homes. The interviews included background information about educational levels and economic earnings. Then participants were asked to complete a test developed by the Educational Testing Service that asks adults to solve practical problems. Preliminary results show that 57% of the adults interviewed could not perform such tasks as figuring out instructions from an appliance warranty or telling someone about a long newspaper story they read. About 51% could not use a calculator to figure out what percentage of their pay is taken out in taxes or add the total cost of a list of items one might order from a catalogue.

"What we are trying to do is move away from speaking in terms of grade levels," Haigler said. "We want to know more about what people can actually do—something scaled to real-life situations." The results of the survey will be used as the baseline measure for progress toward the goal of 90% literacy by the year 2000.

Another effort the literacy office put together was a conference in February 1991 for adult learners. The purpose was to let the learners—the consumers—say what they want from literacy programs. "If you want to put together a good adult education system, you need to listen and find out what their needs are, what their dreams are, what they want from life," said Julie Mabus. At the conference, Mabus, Haigler and program administrators wore red ribbons that said "listener" on them, while the nearly 100 adults in literacy programs wore green ribbons denoting them as "speakers."

Annie Quinn, 45, an adult learner from Jackson who has appeared on statewide television commercials promoting literacy programs, gently coaxed a group of 15 to tell their stories and make suggestions. "This is what we are all about," Quinn said. "Reaching out to the ones who can't speak out." Each person at the conference had a testimonial and an uninformed passerby might have thought he had dropped in on a old-time church revival. And it was a revival of sorts. The adults fed on each others enthusiasm and had no shortage of ideas on how to "reach, teach and keep" people in literacy programs. Among them:

- Use the churches, particularly in rural areas, not only to get the word out but as locations for programs.
- Advertise on television, radio, bulletin boards and grocery bags.
- Find volunteers not only to teach, but also to care for children of students who want to attend classes.
- Recruit more volunteer teachers and provide them with better training in teaching and counseling.
- Tell tutors not to be too soft on the students. "My teacher doesn't take excuses. She pushes me and tells me to keep going," said learner Rose Bridges.

Boosting Training

In 1989, Mississippi took another rare and bold step—following a pattern set by many western European countries—and provided a tax credit to businesses providing basic skills instruction to their employees. The Governor's Office for Liter-

Mississippi Literacy/Training Examples

- In Meridian, Peavey Electronics, the world's largest producer of musical amplification equipment, is testing a skills program developed by the military called the Job Skills Education Program, or JSEP. The company is working in partnership with the Meridian Community College, the National Alliance for Business, and the Governor's Office for Literacy on the project.

- Also in Meridian, a private donor in February established 50 scholarships for city employees to take courses at the Meridian Community College.

- In the Mississippi Delta, the poorest region of the state, a tractor-trailer donated by Frito Lay of Jackson has been equipped with a Mobile Learning Lab and travels to rural communities to provide basic skills courses at business sites. The mobile lab is equipped with 13 computer stations. Classes usually consist of 20 to 60 hours over a four-week period.

- Beta II in Marks, a maker of electronics assemblies for the Big 3 automakers in Detroit, is one of the first companies to take advantage of the state's workplace literacy initative. Through the plan, the Governor's Office for Literacy goes on site and conducts a "literacy audit." Then the office and company work with the industrial trainer at the local community college and the state Department of Education to put together a comprehensive training plan.

- The Columbus Chamber of Commerce and the Mississippi University for Women located the Greater Columbus Learning Center on the school's campus. Adult learners have access to numerous computers and also "feel good about taking classes at the university," according to Ellie Graham, curriculum manager for the center.

- The Mississippi Literacy Foundation is currently working with the Arkansas Literacy Council to develop a curriculum that prepares students to take the commercial driver's license test.

- Adult education coordinators in Clinton, a small town near Jackson, are creating a literacy curriculum that develops basic skills in the context of civic duties, such as voting. The town has been given a $25,000 grant from the Mississippi Literacy Foundation for the project.

acy and the state departments of education and economic development guided the plan through the legislature and implemented the innovative program.

Twenty-five percent of qualified training-related expenses, including costs for instructors, materials, equipment and construction of training facilities, can be credited on the state income tax by employers. But to date, only about 20 companies have taken advantage of the credit, and efforts to propel businesses to take on basic training and skills upgrading have floundered. To provide a push, Gov. Mabus, in October 1990, appointed a statewide Commission on Work Force Excellence to study ways to coordinate the state's training efforts. It will report in November 1991. "There are some success stories from companies all over the state, but by and large I'm not satisfied with what I've seen," said Commission Chairman Charles Holder, president of HOL-MAC industries in Bay Springs. "I hope we can strengthen the coalition between industry, business and education."

Companies across Mississippi are seeing the need for such efforts. Leading that effort are larger cities like Tupelo in the northeastern corner of Mississippi and Meridian on the east-central side. Their economic development leaders are capitalizing on high school and community college vocational and technical education classes to provide a ready-to-work, trained workforce.

"If we aren't meeting industries' needs, we are not doing our job. If we are not doing our job, we are losing out," said Jack Reed of Tupelo, a member of the state Board of Education and a founder of his hometown's business-industry-education coalition. Masonite training manager Pat Crabtree, who is working hand-in-hand with the Mississippi Economic and Community Development office to tailor-make and help finance Masonite's workplace training program, said employers must assume responsibility for their employees' educational needs. "We are all having to take a serious look at our human resources system. We need to make education and training available to all of our employees across the board, regardless of their position," Crabtree said. "We have to train them to do their job, but it doesn't stop there. We must reinforce and upgrade skills as the workplace changes. It must be ongoing."

Tips for Reporters

Remember these stories are about people, not programs. Focus on the human results and needs. Do not get sidetracked by slick reports and overwhelming statistics but continue to cut through documentation to find out what touches people. Programs for programs' sake should not get points. Programs that produce measurable results that are substantiated by those involved should.

But, because you are dealing with people, you will encounter roadblocks. You have to finesse a lot of information. You cannot play the same game of hard ball with a literacy student to get him to talk that you would with a plant manager who will not explain why his company puts no money into employee retraining.

Also do not let skepticism fall by the wayside when talking to literacy program directors and volunteers, who seem to be doing good deeds. One of the surprising encounters we had was the reluctance of some program administrators to be enthusiastic about using an Individual Education Plan for learners, rather than plunking them into the first Laubach reader and setting them all on identical tracks. One program director said, "These people don't have goals." Some program administrators are as guilty of stereotyping adult learners as the general public.

While we found it fairly easy to get learners on the record, program directors would not talk freely about problems they had with the program in fear of retribution from funding sources. Some would admit that they are only "scratching the surface" of community needs.

We found that adult learners in job training programs, particularly those who are employed, were very aware of the changes in the economy and the push for upgraded skills in the labor pool. Most, however, did not resent the changes and, in fact, seemed to enjoy the training they were getting.

Key strategies are:

- Literacy systems typically are very fragmented, so it is best to come up with a way to focus your reporting while at the same time touching on all arms of the system. One way is to choose one community and study the literacy efforts there, and then put that in the larger context of what is going on statewide and across the country.
- The best literacy stories will not be quickies. It takes time to build confidence and trust of adult learners. Either get a firm commitment of a couple of weeks from your publication to work on the stories or squeeze a series of visits to the same programs in over a period of weeks.
- Make some initial visits and get to know the program administrators and meet some of the adult learners. After some brief, initial interviews go back to one or two of the learners whose stories you think will be particularly good.
- Try a team reporting approach, especially if you are under extreme time constraints. It stands to reason that two reporters working the break room of a vocational/technical center can get twice as much information as one.
- Many companies, especially those in the process of making new technological changes, may be reluctant to allow reporters to come on site. If that is the case, you will have to work off-site training classes at vo-tech centers and community colleges. Often several workers will take classes together, and you can get a pretty good feel for what is going on. Other companies are proud of their workplace literacy efforts and will gladly give you a "guided" tour. Many times they want to guide you through the plant for safety reasons. But it is always a good idea to get the home telephone numbers of the workers whom you can call later to see if their comments when the boss is not around are the same as when the boss is.
- Another good opportunity to find a group of workers together could be union meetings. Sometimes union bosses can be as tight-lipped as plant bosses, but other times, if they truly are fighting for more job training, they will open up part of their meetings to the press.
- Be sensitive when talking to adult learners but do not be condescending. Remember that just because these folks do not read does not mean they are dumb. In fact, they have probably had to come up with several clever ways to compensate for a lack of reading skills over the years. Also, these people are not press savvy, so make sure they understand that what they tell you is for publication.

"We are all having to take a serious look at our human resources system. We need to make education and training available to all of our employees across the board, regardless of their position."

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PHOTO BY TIM ARCHIBALD/TUCSON WEEKLY

TUCSON:
Skills Gap in Two Languages

by Susan M. Knight

"Employers are going to have to take responsibility. For years employers have spent a tremendous amount of money for training the cream, the higher echelon. If businesses want to make a profit, they're going to have to divert resources to teaching literacy and English skills."

—director, county College Skills Center

The wing of a Tucson high school had to be evacuated when a custodian inadvertently created poisonous gas by mixing bleach and ammonia. He could not read well enough to understand a warning label.

At Canyon Ranch Spa, some housekeepers do not speak enough English to understand when guests need fresh rolls of toilet paper.

A Tucson truck driver said his adding and multiplication are so poor he cannot count the products and palates as they are loaded and unloaded from his rig.

The Burr Brown Corporation started involving employees more in product quality control, but, first, many workers needed to brush up on math skills so they could compute the necessary percentages and ratios.

A writing class was offered to some supervisors at Tucson Medical Center who had trouble spelling and writing clear memos and performance evaluations.

And at Hughes Aircraft Company, where workers have been asked to be more self-directed and to take a greater role in managing the workplace, many employees have needed to upgrade their math, communication and reasoning skills.

Tucson employers increasingly are finding that workers at all levels need more education—from learning the English language and basic skills to learning how to analyze problems and make decisions. Dave Kolzow, vice president for the Greater Tucson Economic Council, said, "There's a real dichotomy here. At the same time jobs are calling for more literate workers, we also are seeing a declining educational base. A lot more of the workforce are minorities, non-English speakers and people with minimal basic skills."

As the burden of education shifts from the public schools to business and industry, a few of the more enlightened large employers are offering classes on the job. Among those in Tucson are the University of Arizona (UA), Tucson Medical Center (TMC) and Hughes Aircraft. Other businesses pay portions or all of workers' tuition.

But small businesses in Tucson and elsewhere, which employ more than one-half the workers in the United States, are finding they do not have the resources to get their workers the education they need. "We're talking about limiting the productivity of a large segment of the workforce," Kolzow said. If the national estimate of one in five workers functioning at the eighth-grade level or below holds for Pima County, then more than 60,000 workers in the Tucson area need basic education or at least upgraded skills.

Upping the Ante

Most jobs today require at least high school competencies, said Greg Hart, director of Pima County Adult Education. "Employers are ratcheting up their requirements for even entry-level employment," he said, "so even people who used to be able to flip burgers with less than a high school education are now, more and more, required to have a high school diploma."

Trish Anguilo, a research analyst with the Greater Tucson Economic Council, said, "It's no longer how fast you can put a widget together. It is: Can you use a keyboard? Can you read and write at a high school level? Do you know how to use math skills? Can you operate a computer to inventory the widgets? The skills needed on the job require a lot more thinking, a lot more communication."

A recent Pima County Adult Education skills assessment at one manufacturing company in Tucson found that of the hourly employees who worked in non-white-collar areas, 18% were reading below a ninth-grade level. In math, 40% performed below the ninth-grade level. The rates for this company, which is not named because the assessment was confidential, probably are better than many other manufacturing companies' because of the intense screening of job applicants before hiring, said Linda Hellman, workplace education coordinator for Pima County Adult Education.

Hellman has been working with more than a dozen employers in Tucson to establish workplace education programs. And although the county agency just received a $138,555 federal grant, which will be expanded with $59,380 worth of in-kind

Pima County Vital Signs

Population:	683,353
In labor force:	316,000
Unemployed:	14,000 (4.4%)
Living below poverty level:	145,000 (12.2%)

*Figures do not include Indian reservations.
SOURCE: Arizona Departments of Commerce and Economic Security

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contributions from employers, she said the efforts hardly begin to meet the need in Pima County. While the grant will help more than 250 employees in hotels, manufacturing firms and in other businesses, many more need help, she said.

"A lot of workers read and do math at a level that is below what is expected on the job," Hellman explained. "We don't just go in and teach people to speak English or how to comprehend what they're reading. We're helping people with basic and intermediate skills in the context of the workplace. That will make them more capable, more functional at work." Many of those in need of workforce education are literate, but their skills are substandard for work, she said. And there is another large group in Tucson, those who are literate in Spanish and not in English. More than one-third of Pima County's 883,353 residents are of Hispanic descent.

"Employers in the private sector are often appalled at the skill levels of America's workforce. Tucson's no different than the rest of the country," said Mary Hamman, director of the Pima Community College Skills Center, an employment training program that aims to give people skills *before* they enter the workforce. "Employers want employees to read and write and to speak English, and they find increasingly that our workforce does not. I have 25 years in employment training in Tucson. Throughout the years there has been a definite decline in workers' skills," Hamman said.

Rob DeMarco, administrative assistant to the program manager at the state Department of Economic Security, agreed that many workers lack reading, math and communication skills. But Tucson also has an influx of people from around the country who want to live in the Southwest. Many of them are well educated but are taking entry-level jobs just to live in Tucson, leaving the low-skilled job applicants even farther behind.

Employers in Tucson hotels, restaurants, schools and hospitals tell stories of workers who cannot read "Please turn out the lights" signs, who do not know enough English to follow simple directions or who cannot add the hours on their timecards.

"We have people who are truly illiterate and people who are functionally illiterate," said Jane Wilson, training director for Canyon Ranch Spa. "Some people in supervisory positions are functionally illiterate. They can read and write but not at the level they need to do the job adequately. We also have a problem with English. We have 40 housekeepers, and probably one-half of them either don't know English or have minimal English skills."

Business leaders in some of Tucson's manufacturing companies say their problem is not so much a basic skills gap but employees who need upgraded skills. Many are high school graduates but, need more education before they can carry out tasks such as plotting points on a graph to monitor defective product rates on the assembly line. Other employees must learn new ways of applying their knowledge because of increasing technology and global competition with highly skilled workers in other countries.

Several years ago, Burr Brown started a quality control program, forging a team effort among employees to monitor product control and improvement. But before workers could handle the data, monitor work and make decisions, many needed to "develop more of a brain trust," said Miguel Enriquez, director of training and education at Burr Brown. "We discovered that a lot of our folks were having problems with the basic math and reading. We found a lot of our people couldn't figure percentages, couldn't read the manuals," he said.

At Hughes, Daisy Jenkins, manager of personnel development, said education and retraining are essential because industry is in a "fierce competitive mode," the Japanese are setting the pace for enabling workers to determine quality and productivity, and the skills needed five years ago are outmoded today because of changing technology.

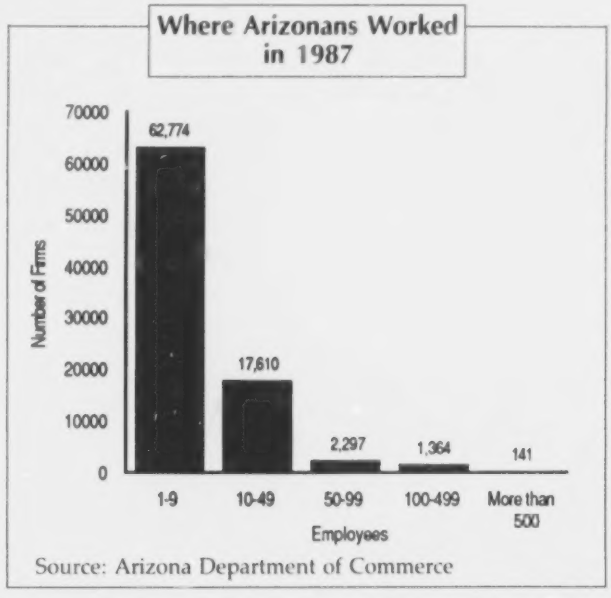
Workers tell their own stories of deficient skills, pretending to understand directions given in English, struggling to read, counting over and over in hopes of hitting the correct number twice.

One custodial worker, who asked to be identified only as Luisa, said in broken English, "When the boss tell me something, I say, 'Yes.' Even when the question do not call for, 'Yes,' I say, 'Yes.' "

Luz Ruiz, a custodian at the University of Arizona, said she has had trouble understanding what people want. Through an interpreter, she explained that, "a professor might ask me to come back to clean later and I'd be standing there not knowing what they're saying. They might ask me to clean the top shelf of a bookcase and leave the bottom shelf alone. And I wouldn't know what they were talking about." Ruiz said her understanding of English has improved since she began taking classes at work, but she still has difficulty.

Jose Luis Montano said he made a lot of mistakes in his 21 years of shoe repair at El Con Mall because he often could not read the tickets. It was not until a divorce left him with time on his hands that he began attending night school to improve his basic skills and earn a high school equivalency certificate. He attends GED classes at the El Rio Learning Center, sponsored by Pima County Adult Education. "I tried to get a job at UPS, but I don't write too well. I had a rough time filling out the application, and I think I didn't do too well," he said.

At Tucson Medical Center, John Lopez said, "It's the math that gets me. I work in the paint shop. When we go out to



Source: Arizona Department of Commerce

paint lines in a parking lot, one of the older guys can measure the lot, multiply and divide in his head." Lopez said he wants to be a supervisor some day, "but it makes me feel pretty silly that this guy can do that in his head and I can't. I realize I need to get more education so that I can move on."

The university and Tucson Medical Center provide basic skills education for some employees. The UA is running an English-as-a-second-language class for 15 to 20 maintenance workers, and Tucson Medical Center is offering a GED class for about 18 employees. The UA and TMC pay a portion of the employees' time in class, and the employees are expected to contribute hours of personal time to match. Hellman said the classes are a good start, but the need is much greater: "The university's physical resources department could fill three ESL classes at the university at three different levels."

Although the first series of classes at the UA was paid for in part by a federal grant to Pima County Adult Education, the success of the classes convinced the UA's physical resources division to pick up the cost of the second session, said Bill Savary, UA director of custodial services. Now other departments, such as food services and groundskeeping, are interested in offering classes also.

Elements for Success

Hellman said the success of workforce education depends on offering classes at the worksite, making the classes part of an employee's workday and teaching material in the job context. "If you teach people information that they are going to use immediately, their retention of that information is much, much greater," Hellman said.

Candace Tucker, an education coordinator for TMC, agreed that offering education at the worksite is essential. "People are tired after 40 hours of work a week at hard labor. The people we're talking about are often in the lower-paying jobs. A lot of them have a second job. They may carpool or take the bus to get to work. They have families. Time is at a premium. It's virtually impossible for them to do all of this and then go somewhere to study English. If the education is not offered at the work site, they won't get it."

At the medical center, Angie Podraza took time off from supervising housekeepers one day recently to work on adding and subtracting decimals. Along with about 20 other employees, Podraza attends GED classes on Mondays and Wednesdays. "No way I could do this if it wasn't at work. I work 10-hour days four days a week, and the rest of the time I have a family," she said. A typical day for Podraza means getting up at 7:30 a.m. to take her five year-old son to school. Back at home, she cleans house, washes clothes and gets dinner ready for her family. At 12:30 p.m. she picks up her son, takes him home to feed him, then drops him at the babysitter's as she heads to work by 2 p.m. She works until 12:30 a.m., goes home to make the family's lunch for the next day and straighten the house a bit, sleeps about six hours, then starts her day again.

The education program at TMC began as education for nurses, but hospital officials realized all employees could benefit from improved skills, Tucker said. Often the best candidates for supervisory roles are on the staff, but a good employee may be stuck in a low-level job without sufficient basic skills, she said. Tucker said a variety of classes have been offered, including a writing class for supervisors who were having trouble with spelling and writing clear memos. The expense of workplace education can add up. The writing class for supervisors cost $4,303, or about $391 per supervisor. The cost includes teacher time, materials and release time for employees.

Most Tucson workers, however, are not lucky enough to have the opportunity for education at work.

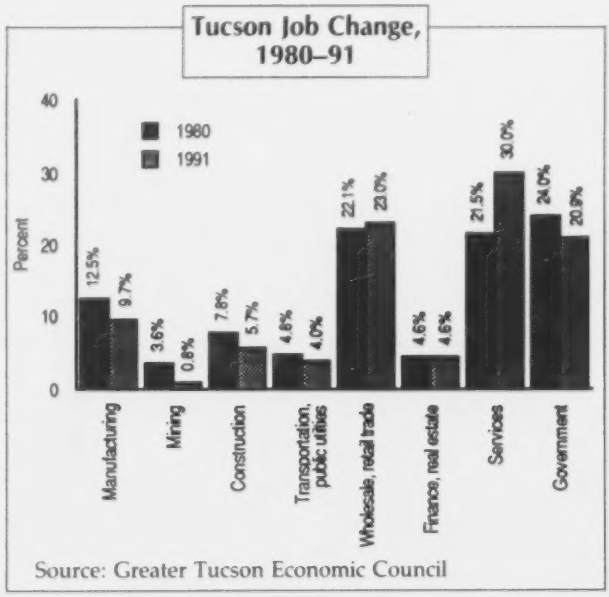
The ESL Need

Given Tucson's expanding immigrant groups and the significant Hispanic population "there probably isn't a company in Tucson that doesn't need some English as a second language training," said Hellman.

In Pima County, where the unemployment rate is a relatively low 4.4%, 316,000 people worked during 1989. Nearly one-third—30%—of the area's workers were employed in services, that is the hotels, restaurants, clinics, hospitals and other service jobs. It is in services that the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics forecasts the most job growth by the year 2000. And it is in this area that employers say they see the greatest problems with workers' basic skills.

"For the hoteliers, education is a real concern. We're seeing a workforce where a lot of people come and apply for jobs who don't have the basic skills or English language," said Phil Gutt, executive director of the Southern Arizona Innkeepers Association, which has 44 members. "Our livelihood is based on meeting a guest's needs, but how do we do that when we have employees who can't understand anything a guest might say," Gutt explained. "You might ask someone for a box of Kleenex for your room. And even though he might ultimately be the person to give you the box of Kleenex, you have to go through a third party. The gardener might look perplexed when you ask him how to find the ballroom."

Yogi Hutsen, general manager of the Sheraton El Conquistador resort in Tucson's foothills, estimated that 30% of his workers speak Spanish as their primary language. "We have a lot of Hispanic staff and a lot of great people. You hate not to hire great people because they don't speak English. We hire people



Source: Greater Tucson Economic Council

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with tremendous attitudes and then train them for the job. Teaching English is part of that," Hutsen said. Unlike most hotels, El Conquistador offers classes at the worksite. But most hotel and restaurant owners say they cannot afford the expense of classes for so few employees. "In our case, we just believe we cannot afford not to provide training," he said.

Because of tight finances, the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) does not offer employees any education or training to rectify basic skills deficiencies. A principal might encourage an employee to go to an adult basic education program, and the school district offers some pay incentives for getting more education. "Just because we're educators doesn't mean we have the means to educate or train our own people who don't meet basic literacy levels," said Mary Ann Lemon, assistant director of personnel. "A person might start working at a school as a volunteer, do well enough that the principal may hire them to be a monitor or an aide and they begin to move up," she said. "The site administrator may shelter them for years. The secretary or principal may write notes for them. The language deficiency or reading problem is only uncovered when the principal transfers to another school and the new principal speaks only English," Lemon explains.

"Sometimes a supervisor doesn't recognize the conscientiousness and interest of employees because of a language barrier or skills problem," Savary, UA director of custodial services, said. "When supervisors can't communicate effectively with a worker, they don't expect as much from that worker, they can't expect as much because they can't communicate what it is they expect. They just expect less."

Meliton "Tony" Mojica said skill deficiencies are frustrating to employees. Mojica was a project evaluator at an international bank in Panama, putting himself through school in civil engineering. Now he works on the moving crew at the UA because his mimimal English skills bar him from other jobs. "The problems with the language are when you have to tell your supervisor something is wrong in the building and you don't have the technical word, or if something you don't like about the job. I can talk a lot of things but I can't fluent," Mojica said.

In the TUSD, said Lemon, "people do get stuck at the lowest employment levels. Because they can't go to interviews, read notices, fill out applications or paperwork, an entry-level custodian doesn't move up." An entry-level custodian earns between $6.80 and $9.12 an hour. Savary agreed that people lacking basic skills get stuck: "I can think of several people who would have risen higher in the organization if they didn't have the language problems or the skills deficiencies."

One recent afternoon, a dozen custodial workers sat around a table in a trailer on the maintenance compound in the center of the UA campus. Two large cooling towers droned noisily outside. "Hay-lo. Theez ees Maria Diaz. I sick today. I can no work today. I have cold," one employee said, a push-button phone in hand, taking a turn practicing the dialogue for calling in sick. One-half of the workers still wore their work uniforms. Some were finishing their work day. Others were just beginning. Later, the students studied pictures of buildings and practiced saying things like, "the men's locker room is on the third floor," and "the lab is upstairs," in answer to fictitious student queries.

Of the UA class, Savary said, "We provided Ellen (Courtney), the teacher, with the documents, rules and regulations that our employees see at work. Ellen talked to custodians about the problems they encounter. She went to meetings they attend, where keys are handed out and instructions are given for the day. She targeted the biggest communication breakdowns." After the first session of classes concluded at the UA, supervisors wrote glowing reports. "Every supervisor felt there were improvments made both in the quality of work and in the rapport with the employee," according to Savary.

The Updating Need

In some businesses, though, employees' education needs are hardly as basic as understanding English. Many firms, particularly the high-tech electronics businesses, hire only high school graduates. Their employees can read, write and do math, but they still need skill upgrading.

"At Hughes, the company is undergoing great cultural change. We are moving toward participative management and employee empowerment," said Jenkins, Hughes' personnel development manager. "All of those things point to a work-

Typical Tucson Business Needs

Tucson Medical Center, the largest hospital in southern Arizona, employs nearly 2,300 workers. As the 13th largest employer in Pima County, the medical center is just like most other businesses large and small—it has a certain number of workers in serious need of more education.

Although more than one-half of the hospital's workers are professionals who needed years of education to become nurses, lab technicians, dieticians, medical records clerks and to work in other hospital occupations, the medical center also employs hundred of workers in nonprofessional areas. "We probably reflect the literacy needs of the rest of the nation," said Candace Tucker, education specialist at TMC. That is, one in five workers are functionally illiterate.

The center's concentration of workers who need upgraded reading, writing, math and English skills is in job areas that do not require special training programs, certification or professional degrees. Tucker says the four departments with the greatest need are:

- Dietary—of 150 employees, 30 are estimated to be functionally illiterate, that is, they read or write below a fifth-grade level;
- Environmental services—of about 100 employees, 25 are struggling with language barriers and at least 30 are functionally illiterate;
- Laundry—of the 50 employees, about 15 speak little to no English and about 25 are functionally illiterate; and
- Plant services—Most of the 72 employees are high school graduates who can read and write at the sixth-grade level at least. Only two have a language barrier, and only a handful have reading and writing skills low enough to be considered functionally illiterate.

force that has fewer supervisors and that makes more autonomous decisions, a workforce that needs more than basic skills," she said. "Employees need communication, problem-solving, analytical, and listening skills." Instead of inspecting for quality, she explained, "we are trying to have workers build in quality. So we are depending more on their analytical skills." Jenkins noted that, more is being asked of workers than ever before. "The ability to learn is critical for today's workers. Education and retraining of the workforce are going to be absolutely essential in the future. It's easier to train and retrain people who have the requisite basic skills than to educate and retrain those who don't. I think we're going to see a resurgence of testing job applicants to ensure employees do have the basic skills," she said.

On-site classes during work time can cut into a company's productivity, Enriquez at Burr Brown said. "You can't be productive if you have 400 people in GED classes. A business has to make decisions, and all of our resources are going to quality improvement programs," he said. At 5 p.m., though, Burr Brown becomes an off-campus site for Pima Community College classes.

Recognizing the need to do more in Tucson for worker education, Enriquez and about two dozen other business leaders and educators have formed the Arizona Consortium for Education and Training. Its aim is to bring together people who have similar educational problems and find a common solution. "We see this as economic development for Tucson," Enriquez said. One solution the consortium is pursuing is "video college," making education available to people in their homes via cable. "It's too darn expensive for each of us to redo the wheel. Why should each business have a GED program?" he asked. "People may be on welfare but they still have their CNN, their cable."

Tucson offers a variety of other opportunities for adults who want to improve their basic skills. Remedial classes or enrichment classes are offered by Pima Community College at its four campuses as well as at many community sites. Pima County Adult Education offers dozens of English and basic skills classes in neighborhood learning centers, high schools and other locales around the city. Classes are offered during the day and at night to accommodate workers with varying schedules. The county department also has special programs that offer education upgrading for homeless adults, displaced women, prison inmates and others.

Another program, funded by the Arizona Supreme Court, provides five computer labs around Tucson for court-assigned adults needing help reading. The labs use the Principles of Alphabet Literacy System (PALS), a program developed by IBM. One of the labs, at Catalina High School, has sessions for students' parents.

Other programs also depend on state and federal funding, such as Job Training Partnership Act efforts, that get poorly educated, economically disadvantaged adults ready for work.

Workers can also find help through volunteer efforts. The Pima County Literacy Volunteers has dozens of adults ready to tutor people in reading at churches, schools and in homes.

On Their Own

For some workers, the community classes are their only hope, no matter how tired they are at the end of the day. Some employers will never be interested in workforce education, Hellman said.

According to one employment specialist, "Many employers are not interested in enhancing the skills of their workforce because then they'd have to pay them more. They apparently don't have a problem with high turnover and low productivity. They can get by."

While Hellman served on a statewide task force on literacy in 1986, she heard one agriculture leader say, "If we made all of those people literate we would lose our workers." Some educators and others told stories of Tucson's "sweatshops," small manufacturing companies where employees eat at their machines, do not get breaks and have no hope for advancement. "These aren't the businesses that are going to be interested in workers' language or reading skills right now, but in the future they may have to or be left behind," said Pima County's adult education director Hart.

As technology increases and with it the demand for more basic skills, employers will have to accept the responsibility for education, said business leaders and educators. "The private sector is going to have to spend a lot more money on training and retraining because it can't depend as much on the public sector," Kolzow said. "It's a shared problem and it should have a shared solution. It's an education problem, it's a private sector problem, it's a social problem, and it's a child care problem. It's *our* problem," emphasized Hamman. "Employers are going to have to take responsibility. For years employers have spent a tremendous amount of money for training the cream, the higher echelon. If businesses want to make a profit, they're going to have to divert resources to teaching literacy and English skills," she said.

The biggest burden, however, may fall to small businesses. They seldom can afford to offer basic skills programs for their few employees, nor do they often have the resources to reimburse workers for tuition. And basic skills deficiencies are more of a problem for small businesses than for large companies.

"I think business and industry, by and large, recognize that they have a problem, but I don't think they see yet they can afford to do anything about it," Kolzow said. "I think some innovative things are going to have to be done. Maybe small businesses are going to have to pool resources."

Kolzow said Tucson has something of an anomaly working in its employment picture because people move to the area for the lifestyle. As a result, Tucson has "a tremendous rate of underemployment, with many people working in jobs for which they are extremely overeducated." He cited 12,000 applications submitted for 1,200 jobs when Sears opened a telemarketing center here last year. Similarly, American Airlines and American Express received large numbers of applications for their informaton processing centers. One company reported Tucson residents scored higher on its entrance exam than applicants at company sites in other parts of the nation.

"The private sector is going to have to spend a lot more money on training and retraining because it can't depend as much on the public sector."

Besides the recent growth in the information processing sector, Tucson also is likely to see rapid increases in medical and health-related fields.

Most of the jobs created in information processing and health-related areas will be created for people who have strong skills in reading, math and communication. "The time is definitely coming when they won't be able to find literate or skilled people in the workforce. Nationally, we aren't getting the number of new entrants into the workforce," Kolzow said. "It just may take longer for the problem to get here because labor is not as scarce here as it is in other places around the country."

Tips for Reporters

- When talking about literacy, be specific with terms. Make sure you know precisely what a source means by "literacy" and be sure the source know what you are referring to. Many different definitions for "literacy" are tossed about. Know whether the people you are talking to about literacy problems among workers mean these who cannot read or write at all, or who cannot read and do math above a sixth-grade level, or above an eighth-grade level. Research shows that American workers *do* know how to read, write and compute. Upgraded skills is what they need.
- Terminology can cause other misunderstandings. "Workforce literacy" turns off many workers. They think, "That doesn't have anything to do with me. I can read and write. I'm not illiterate." If a need in your area is to help workers who don't speak English, be careful about calling these "literacy" programs. Many adults enrolled in English-as-a-second-language programs are quite literate in their native language. In fact they may have advanced degrees in engineering or dentistry; they simply lack English skills.
- Getting hard numbers to illustrate exactly how many workers are in need of workforce education is difficult. Few businesses do any testing to assess workers' skills. Many of the numbers are guesswork, and many personnel and training officials use the national statistic—that one in five American workers lack the basic reading and math skills to be productive on the job. But make sure you know what your sources mean when they say that one in five, one in three, or even one in two workers lack basic skills. What do they consider to be basic skills? Also, recognize these estimates do not tell the whole story because many workers are quite adept at hiding their deficiencies.
- Look at the biggest areas of employment in your community and at those that are changing. What education levels will be required by employees in the job areas that are the fastest growing? If information processing jobs are increasing, what levels of reading, writing, computation and communication are expected of workers? Sometimes new businesses will contract with a state or local job agency to do testing of job candidates. You can sometimes find numbers that represent the skill levels for a large number of potential workers this way.
- Recognize how the needs of different businesses will vary. A hotel chain official might say his biggest need is for people who speak English and are capable of basic reading and math. But the leader of a high-tech firm might say workers are deficient in critical-thinking skills. Most businesses have some reason to upgrade their workers' skills, but the needs are wide-ranging. The needs, and the ability to do anything about them, will be sharply different between small businesses and large companies.
- Look at where workers can get education. While some businesses offer on-site education programs, most workers must look elsewhere to upgrade their skills. What is available in your community? Do many workers really have a chance to upgrade their skills? How do workers access the programs? Are free classes available or must workers enroll in a college program? Do the free adult education programs have waiting lists?
- When a business offers on-site workforce education, how relevant are the lessons for the job? Are the students reading *Beowulf* or are they learning how to decipher the training manual? Are workers at a particular business concentrating on basic skills or are they working on higher-order thinking skills?
- If workers do not have a chance to upgrade their skills, what are their prospects for the future? Are they stuck in low-level, low-wage jobs forever? Could they be fired or laid off because of their skill deficiencies?
- Looking at the whole system for "workforce education," given the economical and sociological complexity of a city or a region, can be overwhelming. A reporter might be better off to take a look at a few employers representative of business in the community. What are they doing, if anything? And how do your findings at those businesses relate to the national call for better educated workers?
- Talk to workers about the problems they encounter on the job, how education might help them do their job better or to move up in the company. Ask them about their average day, how they get to work, what family responsibilities they have, whether they have a second job—to illustrate how going to school on top of all of this might be impossible. Getting workers to give you honest answers can take a lot of time. Once you get to know them, they may drop their public persona and tell you far more than what you learned in that first 15-minute interview.
- Talk to city, county, state and federal agencies involved in education and economic development programs. Talk to professional business organizations; many have an education arm that might have good current research about employers' needs and workers' deficiencies. The state Department of Education often has an adult education office. Community colleges are often involved on many levels, from offering remedial classes to providing training programs for specific businesses. State and federal job agencies also have perspective on workers and their skills levels in different job sectors. Those involved in economic development efforts at the state and local levels also have insight into the local labor force and job market.
- Attend classes at the business sites during the workday and in adult-learning centers at night. In the evening classes, you will find workers who might not have the opportunity to upgrade their skills at work. Many of them are making great personal sacrifices to go to school at night to learn a little more and make a better wage.

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"There aren't a lot of people in the workforce who cannot read. But there are an awful lot of people who don't have sufficient skills, who need upgrading of skills. Anyone who reads below a high school level probably needs to have upgraded skills to be productive on the job given today's job requirements and advanced technology."

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PHOTO BY SUZANNE DECHILLO

Jorge Martinez rides a bike to the train and then takes a bus to get to his program at White Plains Adult Education Center.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY: Cracks in the Systems

by Rhoda M. Gilinsky

"This population has a lot of hassles. The pursuit of literacy should not become another one."
—adult education center director

"This is a splintered system, but the issue presents an opportunity for people to work together," said Renée Guy, director of the Westchester Private Industry Council (PIC). While unquestionably many "literacy/basic skills training" programs operate in affluent Westchester County, there is little agreement about whether they are sufficient, whether people can gain access to them easily and whether they meet the needs of a more demanding workplace and a changing population.

To most people, Westchester, just north of New York City, conjures images of tranquil suburban neighborhoods, extravagant country clubs and charming villages bordering the Hudson. While those images are accurate, other realities prevail as well—insufficient housing and job opportunities for the poor, increasing numbers of immigrants, a growing Black and Hispanic population and the presence of the homeless and hungry. Not easy to categorize sociologically, Westchester is equally complicated in its geography. The county has 43 separate geographical subdivisions further divided into 6 cities, 14 towns and 23 villages stretched out over 450 square miles.

The 1990 Westchester Labor Assessment Report indicates the county has a tight labor supply as job growth outpaces population and labor force growth. The overall county unemployment rate of 3.9% obscures heavy unemployment in crowded urban areas. The report suggests: "One way to build the workforce is to help residents not working and wishing to work overcome obstacles to employment." A second problem arises from the continuing shift from an industrial to a service economy. Managerial, professional and technical occupations are projected to have the highest rates of growth.

"This leads to a mismatch," said the report, "between the growing occupations and the growth segments of the labor force," which will be predominantly minority, unskilled and older. The developing occupations require communication skills and competency in math and reading. This underscores the need for education, training and career development programs in order to fill the job slots. Recent changes in the economy complicate the picture further. Since the report was issued, Westchester has experienced a loss of 4,000 jobs, primarily in manufacturing. Greater competition for existing jobs means that individuals must come to the workplace as well prepared as possible.

Those in need of training are both female and male, range in age from 21 to 60 and come from many ethnic backgrounds, with the greatest need in the Black and Hispanic populations. They possess varying degrees of education and skills, include both employed and unemployed, those on public assistance and not. New immigrants, single mothers, low-wage earners who want to move to higher paying jobs as well as dislocated employees (who may need retraining) are among the present and potential clients.

Providers of services are numerous and diverse. They include the New York State Department of Education through its Adult Education Centers, the New York State Departments of Labor and Social Services, Literacy Volunteers of Westchester, the Westchester library system, two PICs, Westchester Community College, private colleges and universities, business and industry, labor unions and community organizations.

Westchester Vital Signs

Population:	874,866 (1990 census)	
Per capita income:	$19,567 (1987 census figures): second highest county per capita income in NY, 11th nationwide.	
High school graduates (1990):	10,949; 14.1% went to the job market; 80.7% went on to post-secondary education.	
Unemployment rate:	3.9%	
Literacy Programs (1989–90):		
	County-wide	White Plains only
Adult Basic Education	3,827	2,651 (39%)
ESL	6,974	4,075 (61%)
GED	889	
Costs per pupil	$210 (st.est.)	$225
Job growth:	services (predominantly health and hotel industries), government, finance, insurance and real estate; machine trades and benchwork; van driver; truck driver helper; auto service station attendants; teacher aide; programmer.	
Job decline:	Manufacturing, construction, stenographer, agricultural, clerical, transportation, trade, public utilities.	

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Through the funding of different programs, the federal government is a player as well.

Clients contact providers in one of several ways: referrals from agencies, the state employment office, social services, private organizations or schools. Some hear about programs from family members or friends. Others might be employed by a business or company where the need for basic skills or English language or additional training is recognized. Of that group, some may attend classes at the worksite and others might be directed to programs at adult education centers. And in Westchester as elsewhere, there are always those who do not get inside the system at all, for various reasons.

Information on programs is available but fragmented. The Westchester library system has compiled an Adult Education Directory, updated annually, which lists General Education Development (GED), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) providers and other education and occupational programs available in the county. While the directory is a valuable resource, it is accessible only to those who read or those accompanied by a reader. Moreover, when requested at the county's major library, the librarian insisted that no such directory existed.

Clients also can get access information through The New York State Literacy Hotline. However, between February 1990 and January 1991, the Hotline reported only 183 inquiries from Westchester. Of those, 58 came from prospective volunteers; the balance included inquiries about the GED, basic literacy programs and ESL. Thirty-four were general information calls and 29 from Spanish-speaking people who wanted to find out about basic education in their native language.

The ESL program of the Department of Community Services at Westchester Community College issues a bilingual brochure which lists occupational training courses for adults in Westchester. While it is an excellent resource for those in the ESL program (about 450 a semester) or at the college in another program, it is hardly available to all who need it.

Finding Programs

"To find out about programs, people have to do patchwork and try to figure out what service is best for them. Most of the people find this very difficult. They have no way to assess which program is right for them," said Rosa Calderon, dean of Intercultural and Community Advancement at Manhattanville College.

Assuming a client gets some information or a referral, what is the next step? For many people, entry into the system comes through Literacy Volunteers of Westchester at one of their 38 tutoring locations. LVW reaches into many segments of the community with programs at libraries, prisons, community centers, churches, homeless sites and alcoholism centers. The program needs more space for its programs, said Albertha Thomas, executive director of LVW in the county. While there are no recent census figures on the number of functionally illiterate adults in Westchester, she estimates at this time the figure is about 80,000. In the spectrum of programs," LVW is in a unique position because it is a non-threatening, one to one or small group tutoring situation. And we don't keep people there—we try to move them into other programs," Thomas said.

"People decide they need literacy programs when lack of an education is an impediment," says Garrett Murphy, Assistant Commissioner for Continuing Education, New York State Department of Education. "In the state there is a constant flow of basic skills candidates. Every day a certain number of people realize they can't do without an education. That is usually when they are told they could qualify for certain work if they had a basic skill."

Most of the exposure to literacy/basic skills/training in the county comes through the New York State Department of Education's Adult Education Centers at five major sites and a number of satellite programs. ABE, GED, Spanish GED, GRASP (correspondence GED), ESL, life skills, citizenship education, career counseling, and general counseling are offered free to the community, but not all courses are offered at all places. In addition, there is a spectrum of occupational and vocational courses for which there is a charge, often responding to labor needs and community needs locally. Several of the adult ed centers sponsor programs at drug rehabilitation facilities and homeless shelters.

Beyond the basic skills taught, programming often responds to local workplace needs. In Mt. Vernon, a community with a large concentration of Blacks and Hispanics, the district education industry coordinator approached local companies several years ago and asked what kind of occupational programs they would like the school district to provide. "What I found was that they needed people with basic skills—math and writing, as well as programs for those who needed ESL," said Billy Flanagan. "So we brought these programs to the worksite where we are now teaching basic skills—English and math—as related to the work they are performing." Similar workplace-generated needs are being met at other centers, which accounts for the growing number of programs for home health aides, bank tellers and nurses at this time. Businesses, local hotels and hospitals increasingly ask the centers to set up programs to teach either basic skills or ESL or both, as well as occupational training.

While the programs have many similarities, the emphasis is different at each center. The Center for Continuing Education in Yonkers, for example, puts great emphasis on "life issues" and offers programs in parenting, health and interpersonal relations. All centers have some personal counseling, career counseling and life management courses, but employment information/counseling and follow-up seems to be a weak area at many centers.

Populations vary somewhat from center to center as well. At the White Plains Center, the ratio of men and women is about even, while at the BOCES in Southern Westchester, the mix is more in line with national trends with women predominating. Yonkers Adult Education center Director Joan O'Gorman observed that when that center started, it served the disadvantaged worker for the most part. "Now we are seeing more middleclass, more white-collar people who are looking for re-tooling," she said.

A unique feature of the White Plains Adult Education Center at the Rochambeau School is the Job Skills Education Program (JSEP), a computer-based instructional system originally designed to teach United States Army trainees the basic academic skills needed to enter training programs. Under the sponsorship of the United States Departments of Education, Labor and Defense, the program was piloted at Rochambeau. It includes two hours daily working with JSEP and two hours of classroom instruction. Seventy-two students, predominantly

Hispanic and Black, currently are participating. This is not direct employment preparation but, rather, a means of providing a basic skills foundation.

One participant, 20-year-old Jorge Martinez, came to Westchester from Guatemala four years ago. He worked in factories on Long Island, but when they closed, he had trouble finding other work. He now works at a supermarket in Connecticut, helping out in maintenance and other odd jobs. "There are so many opportunities in this country," Martinez said, "but you need the education." Interested in computers, he likes JSEP because he can move ahead at his own level and review often. A high school graduate in his own country, Martinez knows that to succeed in the program and in any job, he needs more English. His reading, he said, is "not bad," writing is more of a problem. In addition to the JSEP program, he spends two hours a day in the ABE program at the center. Ambitious, optimistic, working hard to improve, Martinez said "being here is the beginning."

Martinez heard about Rochambeau from a friend, which is how most clients learn about programs. Marketing is often problematic. While referrals best come from word of mouth and from agencies, newspaper advertising and brochures are used frequently but are of questionable value. "You can't really generate a written ad campaign for non-readers," said Maria Morgan, supervisor of Adult Education for the BOCES at Southern Westchester.

Greater efforts are underway toward coordination of some services within adult education centers. Last year (1990) was the first for ACCESS (Adult Centers for Comprehensive Education and Support Services) and CASSET (Counseling, Assessment and Support Services for Education and Training), both state initiatives. Through these programs, the Departments of Education and Social Services are developing a broader array of services to help prepare adults for employment and self sufficiency, particularly (but not exclusively) those receiving welfare. While no ACCESS site currently exists in Westchester, three CASSET sites are providing child care and case management support services to those most needing them.

Reflecting national trends, immigrant populations are growing rapidly in Westchester, and the state education department is seeking ways to serve that population better. "Because of the immigrant population and often undereducation in their own country, we need to teach them English and to prepare them with a skill," said Sarah Knower, regional coordinator for the Hudson Valley Bureau of Field Services for the state education department. "With the technological revolution going on, more knowledge is needed for jobs. The challenge is how to combine literacy training and occupational training. This is a struggle at the lower levels."

Waiting lists for ESL classes are not uncommon at the centers, and some clients have had to wait as much as many as four months to enter a program.

Private Programs

"I developed self-esteem through the program and gained entrance to the business world," said 25-year-old Suzette March about a word processing training program sponsored by IBM and the Urban League of Westchester. Originally from Jamaica, March has lived in Westchester since 1985. Before, she worked as a baby sitter, earning $150 a week.

"I wanted something better," March said, echoing the motivating reason of many who attend training programs in the county. Through a cousin, she heard about the program. She now earns $21,000 a year as an administrative assistant at a local publishing company. At night she studies accounting at the community college, working toward a professional degree. She returns to the program's classes to speak, hoping she will motivate others. The program, March feels, is not sufficiently well known among a large segment of the population which could use it.

The Urban League of Westchester is "heavily involved with trying to place people in employment," said Ernest Prince, its executive director. The IBM-Urban League program is for the economically disadvantaged and trains about 75 people a year. Basic skills as well as typing, job readiness training and word processing are included. IBM helps develop curricula, loans equipment and donates related supplies. Prince believes the 14-week program works because the link between school and work is made clear: "Most of these people never saw the relationship between school and job and we try to show them that." The program is free, and most of the people who attend are unemployed.

Much of the training in the county comes through the Westchester County PIC. It serves approximately 400 people a year. About one-half are welfare recipients. PIC works with BOCES and other community organizations such as the Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) in Yonkers. Referrals come to PIC from organizations, including labor and employment departments. Funding comes from the state education department (for basic skills) and the labor department (for occupational education).

Small chunks of education and training are provided elsewhere in the county at different agencies. The Educational Opportunity Center in Yonkers, for example, in cooperation with the Westchester Community College, offers a variety of remedial, academic and short-term vocational programs. Clients have low incomes but are not on welfare. The program serves about 600 students a year. The attrition rate in the basic skills program is higher than that in the vocational programs where motivation tends to be higher.

...ding the need is, we are reaching ... few ... that is a lot. It is a small ... proportion of the people eligible for ... services. Outside of the education ... system and the proprietary schools, there ... isn't much occupational and industrial ... education in the county.

Last year a program run by the Westchester County Office for Women addressed the needs of Hispanic professional women with poor English skills who were working in lower-level jobs.

The program emphasized ESL and mentoring but was given only once. It would be repeated if there were money to pay for the teacher.

Obstacles for Clients

While those who get into the system consider themselves lucky, many agency directors believe a large segment of the client population does not have access to services. "We are reaching the dislocated and disadvantaged but we are not nearly filling the need," said PIC Director Guy. "If we are reaching a tenth that is a lot. It is a small proportion of the people eligible for services. Outside of the education system and the proprietary schools, there isn't much occupational and industrial education in the county."

Obstacles for clients come in many forms. A new federal mandate requiring heavy equipment operators to pass a written test has put tremendous stress on employees who have performed well in their jobs but cannot read. Now their jobs are on the line.

Dorothy Archer, employees' assistance coordinator for the New York State Thruway Authority, said: "It's hard for these people to get into the system. Sometimes the people running the programs are insensitive. They might tell the client, 'call back in a couple of days' and aren't aware that people get discouraged. The agencies could make the connection a little easier and less dragged out in terms of time."

Other frustrations exist as well. Andy Morzello, director of the Rochambeau program, said: "This population has a lot of hassles. The pursuit of literacy should not become another one." Often however, it is. Inadequate transportation, lack of time to attend classes, loss of income while attending school, poor housing, lack of child care and health problems, and inadequate guidance and job counseling discourage people who could be helped by the programs. "We expect illiterate people to manipulate this complex system," added Manhattanville College's Calderon: "We expect them to take two buses to get to some program, find the right office and register in a language that isn't theirs and then we wonder why the program isn't successful."

Moreover, some providers mistakenly assume the education and training needs of immigrants are all the same. "Professionals who come to the county have special problems. There are few resources for them. They need immersion programs to learn rapidly in order to [illegible] their professions," said Ilse Velez, executive director of the Hispanic Advancement Program. It serves the rapidly increasing Hispanic community with ESL and GED classes and job and training referral services. While programs at the Adult Education Centers and BOCES are available, they often are geared to the person who has had little or no prior education. Higher-level programs at the colleges are good but expensive. Many newly arrived professionals work two jobs at minimum wages and cannot afford expensive fees. A loan program or small stipend might help, Velez suggested.

For the non-skilled immigrant, other problems exist, some related to cultural differences. "It's hard to come here at age 40 and learn the language," Velez added. "In the countries they come from, 40 is old and people don't start new skills. We have to help them understand that they have 25 years of work ahead and that it is important to learn English and a skill."

The Special Needs of Black Males

"Unless Black youth start to make it educationally here, it's another lost generation," said George Rios, assistant to the county executive for minority affairs. "In Westchester we are losing the battle with young Blacks, and here we are better at it than the rest of the country. This is one of the big groups that needs skills training and basic ed, and there are not enough programs for them."

Attention to the problem must start early, Rios believes. He advocates greater parental involvement in education, more role models in the schools and stronger interest in the schools on the part of business. Retaining young Black males in adult basic education is a special concern of Howard Davis, director of guidance at Rochambeau. "Their experience in school hasn't been good," he said. "There's a big time lapse since they were in school, and they lack learning skills and study skills and need more guidance so we don't lose them in the first week or 10 days."

Motivation of Black males also concerns John Reavis, director of the Carver Center in Peekskill, a settlement house operation which offers community programs in a predominantly Black and Hispanic neighborhood, including a GED program.

"The GED program at the center has not been a success. A lot of black males are unemployed. They lack training, lack the capacity to get along with people, have a history of being neglected," he said. "They're aware that programs exist, but they don't see what they will be able to get out of it because job opportunities for them are lacking."

Reavis believes the vast majority would go for education and retraining if they got a stipend and did not have to take time to travel to the program. "They need some money to keep bread on the table, and we need more training programs right here," Reavis observed.

Is There One System?

There are systems, county experts say, and systems within systems. There is the funding system; the systems within the education department and the system that links one department of state government to another. (New York State is divided into 10 economic development regions, and each region has a superintendent for the Departments of Labor, Economic Development and Education, explained Bruce [illegible], director of the Hudson Valley Regional Education Center. [illegible] that can't be tied precisely connected to each other [illegible] informal and informal system.

"This is a complex area in Westchester," said Marjorie Gilsker, assistant dean, community services and adult and continuing education at Westchester Community College (WCC). "Even within WCC it is complex," she added.

"On the state level, merely attempting to sort out structures presents a bewildering dilemma. In the area of workplace literacy alone, the state education department uses 10 regional education centers, the Department of Economic Development uses 10 other regional centers, and the 27 community colleges network has its own set of employer service centers. And this is only a part of the picture.

Still, David Mathes, executive director of the Finger Lakes regional Center for Economic Development and an expert on workplace literacy in the state, believes that nationally and statewide, some good structures exist. "We have a well orga-

nized GED system which includes ESL and ABE. It is an excellent system with lots of players on the national and state level. The New York system is superb and a lot better than that in many states," Mathes noted. He pointed to $2 million in state funding for workplace literacy and an active and good system for addressing basic skills. "But the workplace literacy system is very diffuse and needs direction and consolidation," he admitted.

Locally, however, some community leaders regard all the systems as weak and emphasize the need for coordination. Velez believes "we need a system at the county level to get an assessment of what the needs are; to search out what is now available in the county and what the gaps are." Other community leaders find the system competitive—which can be a mixed blessing. "With resources getting scarcer we could be less duplicative," said Guy. "There is a need for a better system, a need to coordinate," But she has found that people in different organizations are aware of other organizations and do make referrals.

If the issue is fractured locally, it reflects what is happening nationally, said Benita Somerfield, president of Simon & Schuster's Workplace Resources and a national expert on adult literacy. "The issue of literacy, of workplace literacy, is unfocused, diverse, and fragmented except where a strong governor has set up an entity that coordinates everything." Somerfield believes the most helpful structure for Westchester would be a center in the county that businesses could call to get information and assistance on how to set up workplace programs. Gail Spangenberg, vice president of the Business Council for Effective Literacy, observed that "Westchester is a perfect example of an area that needs a regional literacy council and a directory."

Role of Business

"All companies in Westchester are wrestling with a varied workforce," said Rios, "and they are almost all involved with training in some form." But when corporate training people are asked, most of them talk around the issue, saying they have few or no problems with literacy and basic skills because they do such good screening of candidates.

One representative of a major company who did not want to be identified said, "This is a very sensitive issue. Clearly we don't have one out of five who are functionally illiterate, and we do have incredible selection devices. But these are imper-

[illegible] however, works with a [illegible] to improve its employees' writing and reading skills.

Steven Azzara, president of the Westchester chapter of the American Society for Training and Development, noted that training in the county is essentially done from a corporate perspective. "Training is on three levels—the executive, management and professional development, and staff support. Most of the efforts, following national trends, take place on the executive and management levels," he said.

In the area of professional development and staff support, NYNEX and New York Telephone offer all their employees a Developmental Studies program which they contract out to WCC. Courses include English language skills, business writing, basic math, computers in business, public speaking and interpersonal relations. Employees attend on their own time and pay $60 per course (which is approximately 25% of the cost of the course, according to NYNEX). Statewide, the company spends $800,000 a year on the program.

The Unions

On the state level, there is considerable activity by unions on literacy issues. Locally, however, it was difficult to get much information on programs. In 1989, The New York State AFL-CIO surveyed its affiliates to find out how extensively they were involved in workplace learning programs (basic skills, GED, ESL, on the job training and skills upgrading). The returned surveys indicated that members experienced problems in the workplace because of a lack of basic skills, a high school diploma, adequate English skills, changes in the workplace due to new technology and new job requirements. (The findings were issued in a report," Workplace Learning" by Dawn Krusemark, June 1990.)

Joseph Lia, representative of the first district of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters which encompasses Westchester and Rockland counties, indicated that problems do exist with young people coming out of high school. "We're finding the ones who are choosing trade rather than going to college do not really have the skills in math and reading that are necessary for them to enter our apprenticeship program," he said.

A newly developed Institute for Industrial and Labor Relations at Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, recently applied for a New York State grant through the AFL-CIO to supply the course work for a high school equivalency diploma for any union member in Westchester. Louis Lopilato, director of the Institute, surveyed unions in the county for the number of members and percentages of membership who lacked a high school diploma. Depending on the union, he said, the number ranged from 5% to 50%.

Colleges and Universities

Other colleges in the region are exploring literacy issues as well. Pace University scheduled a seminar on "Workplace Literacy" in late March 1991 and has recently started a new computer literacy program which uses Pace students as tutors to a disadvantaged population. This is one of a number of social issues that the new president of Pace is committed to addressing.

WCC is a major player in the literacy/ skills/training picture. Among its many programs are seven levels of ESL; Project Transition, a displaced homemaker multi-service center; and the Professional Development Center which helps area businesses upgrade their workforce and provide skills training. In addition, it offers extensive occupational and vocational education; bilingual-assisted computer training programs, and bilingual bank teller programs. WCC also has an interesting grant "to increase the awareness in the Hispanic community of the vocational education opportunities in the county."

In Sum

Clearly Westchester County has a number of concerned individuals and active programs addressing the literacy basic skills issues but could use better traffic directing. Suggestions for improvement include drop-in community literacy centers, a county-wide literacy skills assessment survey, a directory of services, a central literacy resource agency and a center where business could go for technical assistance in all aspects of skills training programs. And many experts feel an expansion of

literacy skills training, particularly for the burgeoning immigrant population and disaffected Black males, is badly needed.

While the public has become more aware of literacy issues through TV and radio campaigns, gaining public interest will be needed to influence policy on these matters. Money, of course, will be a major problem, particularly in a time of shrinking budgets. But the costs of a non-literate, untrained population are too high, county leaders say. "We pay for the lack of adequate education and training in some way—whether it's welfare or prisons," the Urban League's Prince said. "The community isn't sufficiently concerned. The biggest problem is convincing people there is a problem."

Other colleagues agree. "Westchester is a county of haves and have nots," noted Morgan of the Southern Westchester BOCES. "None of us can afford to see growing disenfranchisement. It hurts all of us, ethically and economically. It would be a good thing to make all of these people part of the system. The only real tool is education. Ignorance is just too expensive."

Tips for Reporters

In a region as diverse economically and sociologically as Westchester County, digging out this story in general terms is far too complex and requires more months of searching and many more pages of copy than were allotted for the project.

The whole literacy basic skills training story is a challenging, interesting and important one, involving many different levels of information. I originally wrote over 40 pages. What was left was not earth-shaking, but some of it is important to the whole picture. That is why I would lean toward doing it in small and manageable segments. A single piece of the pie in this case might be more satisfying—and certainly more digestible—than the whole thing.

The only feasible way to approach this, in retrospect, is to take pieces of the story and explore them in depth. As I worked on this, I came across at least five or six possible stories—among them, why a business-sponsored literacy program didn't work; the effectiveness of the GED (find out how employers feel about it, I got the sense that it is well accepted and considered an ok degree by most, but in what situations is it not acceptable?); following a newly arrived immigrant for an extended period of time to see where the snags in the system actually arise for one individual; following the one non-government sponsored basic skills program now being developed by a small manufacturing firm in the county (I plan to do this for the *New York Times* Westchester Section). Each of these could be valuable in attempting to understand "the system," but to try to learn about every piece of it in order to get a broad overview is staggering.

Statistics generally are not available; when they are, they have to be taken with the proverbial " grain of salt." When an adult ed program said it has several hundred or thousand per year, one has to remember that the programs are open-ended and people come and go at all points in the programs. Statistics from the state came too late and were not the ones requested. In fact, getting statistical information could be a whole story in itself.

The language and vocabulary of literacy is another aspect which could generate a story—its title perhaps, "How To Speak Literacy." After talking with experts, one realizes, there is little or no agreement about a definition of literacy or a definition of workplace literacy. Moreover, the language is changing. People taking basic skills now want to be known as "new readers." "Workplace learning" seems to be the preferred phrase for unions, although I was told by one person involved in this issue that the correct phrase is "workforce education." The state prefers "workplace literacy." Euphemisms abound. Corporations speak of pride, quality development and staff support—do they mean modernization or [illegible]?

I would have liked to learn more about the different training programs more. Technically, school personnel are eager to talk. Except for how. Corporations are an entire story in themselves. The name of the game is caution and public relations. Union people were helpful in a limited way but for the most part locally seem uninvolved with the issue. Colleges and universities are trying to get more things going but seem unsure about which way to direct their efforts. Everyone wants to look good. My guess is that within the next year all of the 14 institutions of higher education in the county will be jumping on this bandwagon even more.

Read and re-read the abundant materials available and then go out and look at your own community. And keep re-reading your own notes at different points in writing the story. You will understand more each time. I could have spent a week each in Yonkers, Mt. Vernon, Portchester, White Plains and Ossining. That was just not possible. But I learned a great deal and feel that I have started on an interesting journalistic journey.

About the Education Writers Association

The Education Writers Association (EWA), is the national professional association of education reporters. It was organized in July, 1947 by a group of education reporters covering the annual convention of a national education association in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The news of education is as important as ever and the Education Writers Association continues its work to improve education reporting to the general public. The organization has grown since 1947 to more than 600 members in most of the states, Canada and Puerto Rico. Active members include reporters from print and broadcast media. Associate members include writers and information officers for organizations, school districts, and colleges and universities.

The Education Writers Association conducts an annual national seminar and regional workshops where the education issues of the day are discussed. It also sponsors an annual awards competition for the best education writing, The National Awards for Education Reporting. EWA publishes several newsletters and special reports, including *Wolves at the Schoolhouse Door*—an investigation of public school buildings; and *First Jobs*—an examination of youth in today's econonmy.

Media Resource Project on Literacy

This report was produced by EWA's Media Resource Project on Literacy, a project operated with funds from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The Media Resource Project encourages reporters to take a more critical and comprehensive look at literacy. Other activities of the project include a newsletter, *The Literacy Beat;* regional seminars; an information clearinghouse; and commissioned papers by Michael Moss of New York Newsday ("Reporting on Literacy: Soft-Selling a Complex Political Story"), Jonathan Kozol ("What the Candidates Have Not Been Saying"), Irwin Kirsh, Ann Jungeblut and Donald Rock ("Reading Newspapers: The Practices of America's Young Adults"), and Elizabeth Stage ("Can We Stand and Deliver? Mathematical Literacy in the Workplace").

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